

NOT ALL THE KINGS LARSEN

George Agnew Chamberlain

1968

Curt Lawley

G.D.

George Agnew Chamberlain has chosen the form of a novel for this startling message to America and, as a novel, **NOT ALL THE KING'S HORSES** has interesting characters, scenes of intense drama and a thrilling climax. Incidents in the book have a real basis in actual facts. By his creative art this brilliant diplomat and author has written a novel about actual conditions—insult, injury and tragedy—far more exciting, more powerful in its appeal, more moving in its influence than any history or narrative of the bare facts could possibly be.

Mr. Chamberlain went into the Consular Service immediately after college, has never voted and wrote his novel absolutely without political bias.

Merry Christmas
to
Julie.
From
1920. Aunt Dottie.





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NOT ALL THE KING'S HORSES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

Home

Through Stained Glass

John Bogardus

White Man

NOT ALL THE KING'S HORSES

A NOVEL

By

GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN



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GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEXI-
CAN PEOPLES, TO THE INARTICULATE,
TO THE MILLIONS WHO WERE STRUCK
DOWN BY THE HOOF OF THE CONQUEROR
AND FOR FOUR CENTURIES HAVE FED
BLEEDING CARRION TO AN ALIEN VUL-
TURE HOST

"My son, here is the task; choose thou the tools."

"Father, I have no tools. Let me make a pool of heart's blood wherein men may read."

"It is well; if so be it thy heart break not when men cry thy truth to be upon a gibbet."

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"My son, write me a name that liveth on running water, wind-swept plain, changing sands and in the untraveled depths of the primeval forest."

"There is but one such name, Father. Men know it as Pioneer."

Not All The King's Horses

CHAPTER I

THE CITY OF PALACES lies cupped in the depths of a limited plain; north, south, east and west are equal before the eye accustomed to determining direction by a single outstanding landmark or the sudden void of a far horizon, vision meets a unique definition in the unbroken girdle of a mountainous rim. This encircling boundary though indivisible in its symbolic whole, piled high by the gods to form a cauldron wherein men may sweat and stew through the ages in lesser pottering, is yet not without intrinsic variety.

To one view its line rises in denuded hills, bare, pointed, brown and soft against the azure sky as the young breasts of native women; to another, it presents the upward sweep of a pine-clad ridge, lying black like a shadow fixed for all time upon the mountainside, cut sharply along its upper edge as though from that high battlement one might leap

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to the fathomless beginning and end of all things. Farther along the wide arc the sharp tooth of Ajusco stands like a finger starting to point the way to God but discouraged, blunted, sunken and sprawled at its base, shamed by the aspiring summits of those two snow-hooded peaks which confront it and winter and summer ravish the tried heart with an intangible but ever-present illusion of purity and peace.

They too are an integral part of the encircling barrier for there is a mean to human vision beyond which perspective gives way to the hunger of the eye to crowd all it can embrace along the even limit of its reach. Beneath their snowy heights there is a saddle, a gap, almost a break in the mountainous rim and toward this pass a highway shoots straight as an arrow along the level plain only to twist and turn and writhe as it strikes the ramp and rises steep and steeper for the leap that will carry it up, over and down.

The traveler who follows its tortuous way is doomed to the disappointment of fulfillment deferred; no precipitous drop marks its crest, no violent broadening of an outlook too long inexorably con-

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fined. Its downward course is first laid along the gentle slope of an apparently interminable plateau and meanders around knolls, over gullies and through sleepy villages crowding in to form a double wall as though huddling away from the immensity of spaces within easy reach, their houses mean, sordid, yet like the thronging children, smiling through their grime.

The road is old, older than the Conquest; for many centuries the feet of Latins have rediscovered it anew. Like ancient families it has known generations; dig beneath its present surface and you will find its forebears in an almost human succession of rebirth from widely spaced obliterations, yet to-day as at the dawn of history it holds at its end an extinguishable glory.

Richard Digby found it for himself twenty years ago. He was on his way to examine and report on certain old mine workings, his mind was full of thoughts of tailing dumps, of abandoned shafts, caved levels, transportation and costs as his horse carried him through the cobbled street of the village of Huichilac and brought him to the sudden turn marked by the sharp angle of a high wall which cut

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the world away and left him suspended, breathless before a revelation of splendour so present yet so ephemeral and distant as to defy forever complete absorption.

Beneath his feet the road dropped away with a sheerness beyond all expectation after the dulling suspense of the wide plateau and like many another consummation long delayed became a thing too trivial for notice. His eyes were held aloft yet not aloft, plunged in the depths of a vision, a memory of his boyhood's conception of the Vale of Cashmere as that place where beauty lies closest to the bosom of the earth, blanketed by wraithing mists, warmed by a lazy sun and stirring perpetually on the rosy verge between awakening and slumber.

Two thousand feet below yet near as the hand of a child laid upon the breast stretched the valley of his dreams. Pale, golden undulations rolled their still waves against the sloping shores of scattered hills, divided to the thin gleam of silver water and laughed at the frown of a single buttressed crag which towered from their very midst in startling semblance to the imagined giant's castle of long-forgotten fairy tales. Beyond the crag, softening its stark lines, making naught of its chained and

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earth-bound terror, rose great Popo in an even cone of snow which drew the eye to its dazzling pinnacle as to the concentration of a light too deeply fused for human penetration yet soft, lucent, embracing, like sunshine under shelter from the wind on a winter day.

Here and there hanging in the profound scallop were wisps of cloud, patches of dissolving and reforming mist, ghosts caught still at play by dawn and seen through a haze shot with an amber glow so pale that it seemed made up of infinitesimal particles of gold held in warm and gently breathing suspension.

There is no telling how long Digby would have remained spellbound before that scene, all the more wonderful in that it gripped him after wide wanderings and acquaintance with many marvels of the earth, had not Mauricio, his guide, completed the rolling of a cigarette and spoken.

"From here on, I lead, master," he murmured softly as though in instinctive deference to one engaged in worship. "The trail we must find is a hidden and forgotten thing but I shall smell it out for you. Have no fear of that."

He dug heels into the fat sides of his lazy mule

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and forced her to begin the descent with mincing steps, neck outstretched, ears pricked forward and nostrils working like the *attenæ* of some monstrous insect in feigned alarm. The horse followed easily with that quick shifting of responsibility so marked among animals willing to grant the lead to another. Digby took a fresh knee-grip on his mount's sunken withers and sat at a sharp slant, one hand resting heavily on the haunches raised so abruptly as almost to touch the rider's shoulders.

So steep was the winding way that he would have had to look directly down to see the guide; he could still give himself to the view which at each curve broke upon him with entrancing changes yet always holding its promise of enduring and inexhaustible charm. Presently he distinguished with a ravishing clearness the outlines of the town in the valley which had so far appeared merely as a blotch of richer colours on the palette of the Master Painter.

The red-browns of its roofs, the white gleam of its cobbled streets, the multi-tinted walls of its squat houses and, above all, the scintillating brilliancy of the bright tiles which encrusted the half-Moorish towers of its churches, catching the sun

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on a thousand facets and scattering the rays like arrows softened by their fleeting imprisonment from harm to the eye, all welded into the black-green of its summer gardens and seemed to warn the lover of beauty against a too-near approach.

It was almost with a sigh of relief that Digby welcomed a sudden halt on the part of the guide and watched him draw aside with a self-satisfied grin the matted growth which masked the entrance to a narrow bridle-path, long disused.

"It is here," said Mauricio, letting go the branches and settling back to the business of rolling a fresh cigarette as though the mere finding of the trail had brought a final period to all endeavour.

There is no limit to the consideration, the patience, of one smoker toward another, leading almost invariably to emulation. Digby was in a hurry but he hung his knee on the pommel of his saddle, drew out his pipe, filled and lit it and smoked as placidly as the guide who sat looking out over the valley in a dreamy-eyed enjoyment of a sensual well-being too vague and elusive for naming by his dull mind but which held him none the less to that moment of time as to an incident

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worthy of prolongation simply because it was pleasurable. Not even Digby could have seen in this conscious immobility the symbol of a racial motto which clutches at the little things of to-day to the detriment of the weighty affairs of the morrow.

Reluctantly Mauricio flicked away the butt of his cigarette and with heels and abjurations drove his mule into the fronded trail; Digby followed closely, catching the switching branches on his upheld arms. Presently he had no need to defend his face; the trail widened as is the way of abandoned roads once rediscovered and here and there showed the markings of heavy wooden wheels, long since rotted while their sign-manual yet lived to guide the feet of men.

The way still descended but very gradually. It clung to the side of the mountain, now following deep indentations into sudden dark gullies, now pushing boldly around some exposed shoulder which brought a recurring and ever-breathless view of the golden valley. At one spot it crossed a flat, level as the floor of a house, sparsely covered with second-growth trees and hanging like a gal-

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lery above the lazy and untroubled town which had dreamed its way surprisingly near to the foothills.

Digby brought his horse to a stand-still and stared at the last crumbling ruins of a dwelling. "Is this place near the mine?" he asked, wondering at the impulse that drove him to ask the question.

"It is so near," replied Mauricio, "that we may say that we are there. But one more turn, one little turn."

Just beyond the flat protruded a mighty rib of the mountain range; it presented to the elements a saw-like edge, roughened against the winds, standing out and climbing up against the far sky as though its mission were to cut the world in two. The trail crept around its bold nose and then led in a backward sweep which left the valley far behind to an exposed water-shed where ill-defined mounds and gaping caverns proclaimed journey's end to Digby's practised eye.

He dismounted in surroundings so uncompromisingly and suddenly bleak that the flat with its sheltered peace and broad outlook became almost immediately a memory; not even a small tree to which he might tether his horse broke the uneven

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barrenness of old workings too deep in shale to harbour vegetation. He glanced around to see just what he would need to supplement the meagre equipment he had brought with him, returned to the flat, despatched Mauricio to the town below and himself prepared to set a primitive camp.

For three days he burrowed, panned, sounded and took samples; for three nights he and his guide rolled each in a single poncho slept under the open sky on the edge of the world, tucked in a pool of stars, and awaked to a dawn like a tepid bath of floating gold inviting them to plunge and forever forget. From that scene Digby turned away with a well-defined pang of regret; he had small hopes that the powerful company by which he was employed would be interested in his modest findings, he felt in his heart that this moment of departure was one of long farewell to a spot that already had wrapped its tendrils firmly to memory.

His premonition was correct to a certain point; his company examined his report, complimented him on its thoroughness, laid it aside and in due course proposed the abandonment of its option to what were known as the Pico workings. It was at

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this stage of the proceedings that fate was given an unforeseen turn by the impulsive action of the youngest of the local directors, a man of moderate purse, long vision and unlimited daring, Roxon Ellerton by name.

"It appears from the preliminary survey," he said, "that the material in sight would justify a private enterprise. I request that the board make a further inspection at my expense for our mutual protection and if the result confirms Digby's findings as we all know it will, I would like to have the option transferred to my name subject to the original payment."

No objection was offered to this procedure and at the break-up of the meeting comment was limited to chaffing Ellerton on his ambition to rid himself of what money he possessed. He made no reply but sought out Digby and led him off for a walk out of the range of the din of the rumbling batteries. When they had found a nook sheltered from sound and the winds that swept the barren hills, he went straight to the point with a leading question.

"Dick, how much money have you got laid by and how much can you reach?"

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After a pause Digby named two modest sums and asked in his turn, "What's the idea, Rox?"

"I haven't been able to forget," answered Ellerton, "what you told me about your trip to the Pico. Not the stuff covered in the report; that's all down in black and white, but about the flat and the valley and the view. Think of those things getting under your shell-back crust!"

Digby said nothing; he picked up a bit of schist and began crumbling it between his strong fingers.

"Dick," continued Ellerton, "I've taken over the Pico option for our joint account. I've asked the local board for an independent inspection to confirm your report and let everybody off with a clean start and now I want you to think the whole thing out and talk it over with Mary. What could we do with a ten-stamp mill and what would it cost us to put it there? What if we made it five stamps to begin with and grew to ten if the game showed colour?"

He watched Digby's deep-set eyes catch fire and burn in an intensity of concentration which made further speech unnecessary. The two men sat in silence for a long time; then Digby arose and walk-

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ing still in a trance made his way back to the camp and to his own modest dwelling, a bare shack as comfortable as money and circumstances would permit but standing like a sister to dust, without outlook, a clapboarded alien shell in a land of thick mud walls.

As he climbed the steps to the hollow-sounding veranda his wife, Mary, opened the front door and welcomed him with a quick, intimate smile, such a smile as a woman of deep reserves keeps for the one man while he holds her and at his passing buries forever with crushed ribbons, crisped rose-leaves and the memories of that youth which once released knows no returning.

"You're early, Dick," she said in a voice as contained but as warm with promise as her smile.

"Not too early to find you dressed," replied Digby, laying his hands on her shoulders and holding her at arms' length while he studied her.

She was not dressed in the full social sense of the term; what he meant was that she had changed in the late afternoon as was her custom to a formal gown. It was of dark ribbed silk, transparent above a fitted white bodice and white underskirt,

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relieved by strips of ribbon from which, below the knees, were suspended two flounces of black net enveloping in veiling clouds ankles and even feet in a chaste modesty forgotten by a later day. Around her neck and waist were bands of white and at her throat was a bit of lawn like a flurry of snow. Her soft hair, divided in the middle, swept down low over her ears but was carried up at the back in a twisted knot that peeped over her head with an air of imprisoned impertinence.

"You've got something you want to talk about," she stated in answer to his long look, "and, oh, dear, here they come!"

Three voices, one in a shout, one in hysterical laughter and one a mere squeal from a very young person, heralded the onslaught of Digby's children. First came Richard, Junior, a boy of five, round-cheeked and round-eyed, seriously intent on giving his father a rough handling; close behind him followed Laura, older by a year but never in the lead, laughing excitedly. Trailing in their wake, Madeleine, the baby, emitted young animal grunts of determination as she propelled herself in an inexpert, short-legged zigzag across the floor.

Digby sat down in a big chair and gathered them

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up, one after the other, until his arms were full of a soft, palpitating mass that with many rustlings of fresh garments and prolonged wriggling finally subsided to comparative rest in his lap. He buried his nose in their hair, in the baby's neck and against Laura's cool cheek. "They smell of soap," he murmured as he raised grateful eyes to his wife's face.

He was not at this stage of his development an especially articulate person but he had a way of saying many things with a single look; so now he thanked Mary with a glance for her continuing endeavour toward cleanliness in an atmosphere of general relaxation, told her he knew what it cost in labour but that the effort was well spent if it could add enchantment to orthodox affection.

"Clean children," he whispered as though in explanation to himself as he raised the baby bodily in one hand to tickle with his moustache its fat bare leg, so incredibly smooth, soft and pliant yet so undeniably a living and active substance as he presently learned by a kick from the knee that brought tears to his eyes.

That evening when the children were asleep, each in a separate crib, Digby returned to the big

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chair, lit his pipe and drew his wife to a seat against his shoulder. The windows which had been closed throughout the day to exclude the dust were now open but through them came no fragrance; instead the odour of damp dumps, bare of plants and foliage, lay heavy upon the air.

"Mary," he asked, "do you like it here?"

At the question his wife's body slowly straightened. "Do you have to be here, Dick?" she asked in return.

He laughed aloud, his arm tightening about her waist. "If I do, why you'll continue to like it!" His face sobered. "We don't have to stay here," he continued. "Ellerton put a proposition to me this afternoon; it will take every cent of our savings. I want to talk it over with you."

"Mr. Ellerton," said Mary slowly, "is a gambler, a nice, lovable gambler." She arose and took another chair from which she could watch her husband's face, gathered in a frown not of impatience but of concentration.

"Yes; perhaps," said Digby, "but listen to me for a while. You're too close to the big mine here to see something a whole lot bigger if I don't show

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it to you. The world has never known better miners in the rough than the Spaniards; they were thorough, persistent, insatiable. They clawed the Americas, North, Middle and South, with their finger-nails and few were the chances they missed. Grinding away with their *arrastras*, using beds of stone for their amalgamation, making the best of the materials at hand, they took everything there was to take in their day. Where they passed, scarcely a single new field of importance has been opened since. But in 1890, not ten years ago, something happened."

"What?" asked Mary, breaking into Digby's silence of absorption.

"MacArthur and Forrest patented the commercial process of potassium cyanide," he replied. "That doesn't mean anything to you, does it? But on that event hang a number of tales. We technical men came into our own. If you want to manage a gold mine to-day, it isn't enough to have a nose for the run of a reef or to be a master at underground work or a financier at flotations or an alchemist come to flesh. You've got to be them all. Even that's a mere incident. You didn't know

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you were living in the midst of a miracle, a resurrection."

Mary glanced out of the darkened windows and smiled. "No," she answered, "I hadn't felt that."

"Perhaps I've put it a bit strong," said Digby thoughtfully, "but anyway, it's a mighty progression. The Spaniards with their old *arrastras* had the right idea; gold is recovered to the extent of its pulverization, its infinitesimal subdivision. They pounded their ores as fine as they knew how and left the tailings and the bodies too deep or too low-grade for profit to the day of cyanide, our day."

Mary shook her head from side to side. "I don't see what that has to do with it," she confessed, the corners of her mouth drooping.

"You will," said Digby quickly, "when I tell you that cyanide goes beyond subdivisions; it reduces gold to a solution, practically to a liquid. Think of oil and water; call the water gold in suspension and the rest of the mess you've seen in the tanks the oil. How easy to run one off from the other and how cheap! The recovery of gold isn't quite so simple as all that but I just want you to see."

"And I do," said Mary. "Couldn't you have told me sooner and come to Mr. Ellerton?"

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"Not one word sooner," said Digby. "An ounce of solid conviction is worth a pound of easy conversion. I wanted you to see that when Ellerton and I take over old mine workings with an established tonnage of dumps in sight, we aren't gambling; we're simply riding the wave of the mathematical progression that I called a resurrection. Listen."

He reached to his desk, drew out a printed report and turned to a much-thumbed table of figures. "In 1893 this whole country produced just over sixty-three thousand ounces of gold. We and the English came in here with brains, cyanide and a little money to buy what others couldn't use, and in 1894 the production jumped to two hundred and eighteen thousand ounces. This year it will pass four hundred thousand; ten years hence I'm as sure as flowers in spring that it will go over the million. Is that a resurrection, girl, or isn't it?"

"It is, Dick," answered Mary. "I'm with you; what you believe, I believe. I—I have to. You know that."

He reached over to lay a hand on her knee. "You women," he said wonderingly, "have to believe with heart and head. There's no good telling you things

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for the sheer truth in them; unless your heart's in it, they pass over."

"Why, Dick!" cried Mary, a faint flush in her usually pale cheeks and a gleam of amusement in her eyes. "You're becoming a philosopher or at least an analyst."

"I've been an analyst by inclination ever since I can remember," said Digby soberly, "and by profession for six years, with you. Talking of gold as a soluble in cyanide made me think of a woman's heart and head in the same terms. I guess we're all like that; apt to measure life with the yardstick we know best."

Mary arose, came to him and knelt between his knees. "Take me in your arms for a minute," she said, laying her face fleetingly against his cheek.

She was of those women who are like walled gardens, presenting to the world unbroken fronts, misers in demonstration of affection, deep wells of emotion held in reserve and rarely stirred by the dip of a drinking cup. The slightest giving of self from such a source attains a significance far beyond the easy, total surrender of lesser personalities and moves man to unimagined depths of sensation.

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Digby wrapped his arms about his wife and crushed her to him.

"Oh, Dick," she whispered, "don't be rough."

"Recite to me, my son, the rule of beginnings."

"As the twig is set, the blade sprung, the seed disposed, so shall the plant be."

"How short is the reach of thy wisdom! Add thou, 'Until the hurricane.'"

CHAPTER II

DIGBY quickly obtained his release together with a bonus and a hearty God-speed-you from the monster concern he had served during six years. The generous treatment meted out to him brought with it a pang almost of regret for the parting but the wound, such as it was, soon healed under the unfailing elixir of independence which since the birth of time has inspired man with the belief that only he who is his own master can stand quite erect.

Accompanied by Ellerton he revisited the scene of what soon was to be known as the Pico mine. They merely glanced at the old workings and the tailing dumps, returning on a common impulse to the flat as a center from which they might best obtain a broad survey of their entire enterprise.

Ellerton became enthusiastic to the verge of excitement as he inspected the level ground. "Dick," he said, "there's an acre of it; good loam, too, silted

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down thick and deep. You can grow anything, anything there's room for."

He moved to the precipitous edge. "Look here," he continued. "You can bring in a driveway along the trail from the main road and we won't think of using it for the mine traffic. No sir. We'll swing a cable straight down the mountain for that. It's the sensible thing anyway, for by the time we're ready Hanley's railway will be through to the town. A bit of luck, that; a great bit of luck."

"There are a lot of bits of luck around here," said Digby thoughtfully. He glanced up at the mighty rib of rock which walled the farther limit of the flat. "Take that, now. Sound can't come through it nor wind."

Ellerton nodded. "Power, too," he said, continuing his own train of thought. "We're within easy tapping distance of the city plant." Then he added more eagerly, "I'll tell you what let's do, Dick. Let's get busy on the driveway and the house; we've got to have them anyway and Mary hates the City. Let's build the whole thing *pronto*, name it Mountain Acre and spring it on her."

Digby smiled a slow smile. "The name's all right," he said, "she'll love it because it's the only

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possible; the driveway, too. We could get away with that. But as to deliberately building Mary or any other true woman a house, sight unseen, why, you're just not married, that's all."

"Are they like that?" asked Ellerton meekly. "Well, couldn't you get her to O. K. the plans?"

"I'll try," said Digby.

The remainder of their visit was devoted to strict technicalities of scientific mining; they studied anchorages, foundations and equipment space, mapped out rights of way for immediate purchase, speculated on their resources in the face of their needs and finally explored water sources and a supplementary trail direct from the mine to the town beneath.

Upon returning to the City they effected a division of labour; Ellerton was to busy himself with the securing of all necessary titles, to Digby fell the work of placing orders immediately for a ten-stamp mill and accessories. As soon as that was off his hands he was to go ahead with the building of his house, an occupation which would form the strongest possible palliative for natural impatience during the long interims between ordering and consignment and actual delivery.

His conscience would not let him even broach the

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subject of their new house to his wife until he had sent off the last of his carefully prepared specification sheets but, that done, he provided himself with a large pad and pencil, drew her aside in the quiet of the late evening and asked her the great question.

"Mary," he said, "I guess every woman who has had to put up with ready-made surroundings has a dream-house in the back of her head. I don't mean a castle in Spain, but a genuine home for every-day wear. Have you got one handy so that you could put it down here?" He pushed the pad of paper toward her.

She took it and fingered it absent-mindedly. Her eyes grew large and absorbed in concentration, her lips moved softly in unspoken meditations. "Dick," she said finally, "you're a dear boy, a thoughtful boy. Here; write it down. I want a low house without stairs, but high ceilings; thick, *adobe* walls, a house four-square with a patio in the center. Will vines grow where we're going and plants?"

"Every single thing under the sun," answered Digby, glancing up to smile at the wistfulness in her tone.

"Then along the whole front a tiled pergola in-

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stead of a veranda and from each room at least one French window opening all the way down."

"Picnickers," murmured Digby.

"What did you say?" asked Mary, impatient at the interruption.

"Nothing," answered Digby hastily. "Why not have them all that way except at the back of the house. There will be no mosquitoes."

"All right," she agreed. "I don't want tiles in the house; they are chilly, not really pleasantly cool and they tire one. Could we have *waxed* floors?"

"Of course," said Digby without looking up.

"Well, hardwood floors, then," continued Mary, "and only two big rooms at the front, one on each side of the doorway and hall, a dining-room and a living-room. One side of the house will be bedrooms and bath; the kitchen will have a corner, but the backmost corner. Do you understand that?"

"Surely," said Digby. "In the back wing with the kitchen, a pantry, washhouse and servants' quarters. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Mary, "and opposite the bedrooms,— That's all we have left, isn't it?"

He nodded.

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"Well, opposite the bedrooms a guest-chamber and bath and a den for you."

"Is that all? Are you sure?" he asked.

"No, not all," said Mary. "There's this." She took his face in her hands, kissed him full on the lips, dropped her head to his shoulder, relaxed her body against him and began to cry softly.

He patted her on the back, a smile of understanding in his gray eyes.

The next three months were among the happiest in Digby's life, for excitement added its fillip to content. He worked like a Trojan and as all the materials and labour for the sort of house Mary had chosen were ready to hand, its construction proceeded at a speed seldom achieved in that land of many morrows. He was often away for a week at a time, sleeping by night under the stars as on the occasion of his first visit with Mauricio and by day urging the peons and carpenters good-naturedly but effectively to a bare continuity of endeavour which in itself became a sure measure of pace toward completion of their task.

These absences awoke his wonder at the fulness of his happiness; he had been away from Mary be-

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fore but never with this frequency of interim and return leading to increasing satisfaction at every meeting. Puzzling over the problem, he strove to put it in terms of professional technic and speculated as to whether the spirit of absolute communion is not an alternating current.

Many were the strange thoughts that came to his brain, grown suddenly to a new activity as though from a fresh birth, during the long hours of idle supervision. He stared out over the valley time and again, frowned and questioned it as if in its deep cup of beauty were held a meaning just beyond the reach of his development, a significance that steadily pursued would some day burst upon him in an illumination which might envelop the whole earth, seen now but dimly and blurred as through a mottled glass.

In such moods he had a feeling not of impotence but of attainment deferred. He and Mary were young, they had not the security which comes to appetites dulled by age, they were exiles, far from their native land and all the implications of support which kindred and old associations bestow, but to their uncertainty and the apparent precariousness of

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their footing had come a great compensation, a compensation of enduring youth: they stood upon a threshold; their own.

At last the house was complete but starkly bare; power had been brought to it along with the preliminary installation for the mine and here and there Digby hung temporary lamps pending arrival of the fixtures of Mary's choosing. Water in plenty had been piped and with a fine head from the new dam far up on the mountain; the calcimined walls were stained a light golden drab; all the debris of building had been carted away and with it the underbrush from the entire flat, leaving it naked beneath the few trees, carefully conserved.

The trail had been cleared to an even width all the way to the highroad, but was still rough and unfinished when the heavy cart arrived loaded with the cots, bedding, pots, pans and provisions that Mary had selected as the minimum with which the family could camp in comfort in the new home. She did not come with them nor did the children, but on the following day Digby arranged with the friendly contractors a car to bring them all to the railhead which was already within half a mile of

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the town in the valley. From there a wagon drawn by four mules carried them to the very house.

The excited children clamored to be put down the moment the mules, panting from the steep ascent, came to a halt; but Mary sat quite still except for the agitation of her bosom. Before her were the house and the pergola, the latter more wonderfully fitting than she could have imagined for it gave promise of a stately embowered gallery on the edge of space; on her right was the flat. Wherever she looked her eyes saw nakedness but it was a nudity as full of promise and as demanding of tender care as that of babes newborn, crying for soft raiment. To her left was the valley. Upon this first full sight of it her eyes widened, turned dim as though drunk with quaffing too greedily of its beauty, filled slowly with tears.

Digby held out his arms and helped her down; he waved one hand in an enfolding gesture toward the flat. "There's just one acre of it," he said, "tucked here into the mountain. What shall we call it?"

"Just one acre?" repeated Mary still a little dazed. "Why not call it Mountain Acre?"

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"That's strange," replied Digby placidly. "It's the very name Ellerton suggested. It must be the right one if you both thought of it."

"You boy!" cried Mary, smiling through the moisture in her eyes. "Don't you suppose I can see that you deliberately put it into my mind? Give Rox Ellerton the honour that is his due; it's the only name."

Happy are those who can look back to beginnings, who can recollect the birth of a wistaria trunk of the thickness of a man's arm, who can pick the fruits of trees planted by their own hands and see in stalwart sons and daughters the full day of a pink remembered dawn. Youth builds unknowingly; it doubts of the ultimate fulness of a sprouting vine, sighs at the hope deferred of an orchard in embryo and despairs utterly of the creeping fruition of a buried acorn, seldom planted with deliberate intent save by the very old who have learned in the shadow of fronded, towering trees the fleeting quality of years.

Mary and Richard Digby were still young in days and in heart when they came to Mountain Acre but it was their good fortune to be able to measure their

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probable stay by decades. So exact was the modern science of Digby's profession that the success of his and Ellerton's venture could be counted ahead in dollars and almost in cents; so much to initial expenditure, so much to his salary which was to continue at the same figure which he had lately received, so much to the overhead charges, so much to running expenses based on exhaustive knowledge of prices, labour supply and transportation facilities, so much to a sinking fund for the recovery of the original capital during a term of years.

These were all accurate sums, fixed not immutably but as firmly as the prescience of men deeply acquainted with all existing conditions and probable eventualities could establish. An earthquake might unsettle them, or an eruption of a near-by volcano or a social upheaval or an assault by unlimited capital on the mining titles, most fallible of all treaties among individuals. But such events were highly improbable; they constituted the unavoidable unknown risk named in ancient documents of the sea under the indefinite terms of *force majeure* and "act of God."

Earth tremors were known in the vicinity but had

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done no damage in the memory of man; activities of neighbouring volcanoes had left their traces but they were equally remote; for centuries the country had been a maelstrom of rapine and social disorder, but during the score of years preceding the reopening of the Pico mine it had known peace and exemplary security. As to titles, possession of a mine differs from almost every other material tenure; its benefits are strictly temporary and as a consequence the mere continuance of a dispute favours the holder if he can support a running fight.

Against the outgoing sums falling upon the Pico enterprise was balanced the most unvarying of all commodities, gold, the standard of the world's values. Its existence, its proportion to the ton of tailings, the amount of these tailings in sight and the capacity for recovery of the plant installed were all facts, mathematically established. They showed a definite margin of clear profit within which two men of such exceptional experience as Ellerton and Digby could feel reasonably, even exuberantly secure.

In the face of such conditions it is little wonder that Mary should have taken time for the purchase

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of furniture piece by piece and chosen for both beauty and endurance, or that Digby should have planned out the planting space available with grave deliberation, picked out his seeds and nursery stock after long consultations and awaited patiently their arrival, in some cases long delayed.

The results of such pondered beginnings were slow in development, they did not assail the senses with sudden breath-taking transformations, but from the day their influence was felt it aspired steadily to the long, strong hold of the fibres that grow with and around the heart. The children were still children when Mountain Acre had become a synonym for embowered peace, hiding beneath succeeding encrustations of foliage, moss and kindly staining lichens its sharp contours, rough surfaces and once naked estate, still tenderly remembered at least by Mary and Richard.

To Laura, Richard Junior and in less extent to the baby, Madeleine, the high pillared and trellised pergola that formed the link between the whole front of the house and the precipitous descent into the valley had become a balcony completely overgrown with sturdy perennial vines by the same slow

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magic which had brought strength unnoticed to their own legs.

Even the eldest of them could scarcely remember that the fronded garden had once been bare, the domed mango trees mere striplings leaning on yardsticks stuck in the ground for their support, or imagine the low red brick wall which continued the line of the pergola and had guarded them from rolling to destruction in the abyss, stripped of its close-trimmed covering of matted English ivy. Yet each and every one of them had been frequently spanked for stepping through the thin line of wands which now formed a privet hedge four feet thick and as high as their father's shoulder.

This hedge bounded the Acre on three sides, rising to high trained arches over the exit to the path leading from the house around the mountain rib to the mine and over the wider gate giving ingress from the driveway coming from the highroad. The drive had become a shady smooth delight of crushed stone, crowned and drained against the rushing torrents of the rainy season. Midway of its length a gully had been graded and leveled to hold the stables, chicken-run and a pig-pen.

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To the children the hedge symbolized control, the barnyard privilege; none could define exactly the line beyond which the freedom of the latter was conceded by parental authority but generally speaking it came to each child at the age when he or she could climb a tree limb to the ridgepole of the stable and slide off the steep roof without breaking a leg or an arm.

While the delights of the barnyard and its environs maintained their supremacy in the affections of the juveniles for many a year they never attained even a transitory hold on the parents' hearts which owed a fealty to Mountain Acre proper, backed by overhanging cliffs but faced by a far and broad horizon; an allegiance too deep and hidden for words and that could be expressed only in such pre-vocal communions as the pressure of a hand, a dimming of the eyes or a sigh quivering up from the depths of feeling and fluttering at its end between laughter and a sob.

On a night when moonlight surged its overflowing flood to the farthestmost limits of the golden valley, tagged hill and castled crag with spilled blots of shadow and held the high snows of Popo in ghostly

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suspension, pale, paper-white, unreal as though threatened with annihilation by any vagrant gust of air, Digby sat with his wife at the gallery's edge, his arms resting on the balustrade of masonry as if he needed its solidity as an anchor to his far-flung eyes. So long did he hold them to the engulfing scene that Mary, contrary to usage, grew restless of the silence.

"Dick," she said, touching his shoulder, "what is it? I see the beauty, dear; as Rox said the other night, it squeezes tears from the heart. But it isn't that that has gripped you."

"No," said Digby, sinking back in his seat, "you're right; there's beauty there, unlimited charm, and because it seems to have no end it bears a message still unread. That's what worries me, Polly. I've got to read it. I never was good at waiting for revelations."

"Oh, Dick, you analyst!" cried Mary, springing up and rumpling his thick dark hair, "can't you spare even our wonder valley? Leave it its mystery, dear. Come into the house and let me play for you."

But not always did the trellised balcony harbour such overcharged moments; it was the constant scene

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of many an evening romp and still oftener the coign from which three children caught glimmering flashes of worlds real and unreal through their father's eyes and lips. He was a great man for youngsters. Thrown directly from college into the hard school of the field engineer, cut off from clubs, reunions and the froth of social amenities, subjected to hard journeys, privations and frequent lonely hours, he had early acquired an avid appetite for the simple and basic elements of old-fashioned homecoming.

Fortune had mightily favoured him in the peculiar qualities of the woman he married. He had not picked her up in any byway of adventure, but grew up with her in one of those boy and girl friendships which trend tacitly and shyly toward ultimate possession and are built on a mutual faith which by reason of its very strength, once broken knows no mending. Mary was of that New England stock the surface pruderies of which have so filled the eye of the world that it has been blinded to far more significant qualities; passions held in reserve like banked and undying fires, self-imposed prohibitions carried to an extreme which leaves no middle ground between virtue and total destruction.

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She was paradoxically violent in slow decisions which, once arrived at, became as immutable as the span of life. Such women can be held; they can never be retaken.

Ever since he could remember Digby had been subconsciously aware of this fundamental limitation and he was absolutely content within its bounds. Let others yield to the moral vagaries of his generation which first found itself cut adrift from the anchor of religion accepted in all its tenets as a matter of course and turned, bored, from faith torn to bits in the field of controversy to indifference and then to laxity; he and Mary would walk the old path, narrowed not by bigoted prejudice but by the inhibitions which were the fibre of their dual being. In an age distracted by divorce, the single standard and allied subjects of promiscuous sex as the uncharted channels of daily thought, these two were steadfast not through piety but because loyalty was the keystone of the arch of life.

The family thus escaped the atmosphere of social problems and had leisure for the habit of happiness; a bald and bold statement of which the far-reaching

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implications are difficult of prompt assimilation. The influence of this negative ambient, however, laid its living touch on Digby's inner growth. In any other air he might easily have continued in the standardized category of an American of his class, absorbed in considerations of income and expenditure as the skeleton art of living. But fortune having led his feet into unusual ways without wrenching them from the traditional path of personal honour, he was gradually attaining a broad foundation of mind, an evenness of temperament and a contemplative brooding over simple verities which made him an ever-deepening well of philosophic conviction.

What man has not dreamed of this estate and finding himself rocked in its transitory cradle followed that hope which springs eternal in the human breast and aspired to the high permanence of the still stars in an infinite firmament? Digby asked no more of heaven than what he now possessed. To be for an hour of each evening with his children on the cool tiled gallery after the strain of the noisy day's hard work and have his wife's playing, half muted by intervening walls, weave its undertone to

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a share in their intercourse was to him the full fruit of bliss, too sound in flavour ever to pall upon the palate.

On one such evening he beheld the size, studied the propensities and speculated on the potentialities of his three youngsters with a feeling of sudden awe. Whence had they come, how attained to their astounding weight and firmness and whither were they bound? Already he could see in each a materialization which cut them off from that elfland which is the peculiar realm of little children, wherein we see them as actually allied to fairy folk and poising, breathless and half-winged at the thrill of a sound first heard, a taste new to the greedy tongue, a wonder fresh to curious and ludicrously sober eyes.

Laura, his first-born, was a pale slip of a maid apparently frail but guarding within the transparency of her delicate flesh the steady flame of an unconquerable spirit. She was on the verge of transition, standing on the threshold of those mysteries revealed which bring swift age to girlhood and chain body inexorably to mind, but Digby knew instinctively that for her he need feel no fear. She

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was of the flowers of God's earth, destined to bloom serene above the mired exigencies of life linked to knowledge.

Richard, Jr., commonly known as Junior, was of different stuff. His close-knit body had an affinity for rawhide which led him to select a thrashing every time he was given the choice between physical chastisement and going without his supper. The event was of frequent occurrence, for he was possessed of an investigating mind which led him into filth, destruction and occasionally personal danger. Had his father been of those parents who punish their children in the white heat of anger, substituting malignancy for calm judicial execution, the boy's fibre inevitably would have been twisted from straight growth, perhaps broken. But between these two, father and son, there seemed to exist a mutual understanding as to the fitness of the ancient custom of corporal punishment and a disinterested agreement in the method of the rite.

To-night, with his eyes full of the awkward lankiness of Junior's twelve years, Digby looked back half their span in memory to the day when he had first discovered his son as a distinct personality. He

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had just administered a thorough strapping and was amazed to see a dreamy smile of attenuated anticipation creep through the grime on the boy's tear-stained face. He took him by the elbows and smiled an answer to that look.

"Tell me what you're thinking, Junior," he begged.

The boy gave him a roguish glance and a reply that by reason of its sheer precocious recognition of changing values established him once and for all in his father's respectful regard.

"I was thinkin'," he said, "that some day I c'n lick you."

"Whenever you feel that the time has come, boy," replied Digby when he had recovered his poise, "go right ahead."

Whereupon Junior had turned his round, sober eyes to a careful inspection of his father's six feet of hardened brawn, nodded his head solemnly and muttered, "Aw right."

From such dawning moments of flashing intelligence, gleamings of nascent will and births of the indomitable spirit of a conscious individuality aspiring to stand alone, spring the sources of undying

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affection. Digby, moist-eyed, turned rather hastily from the contemplation of his son to seek distraction in the young lady who sat restlessly upon his knee.

Here was a problem, a sum in all the dimensions of arithmetic that changed its terms just a little faster than one could figure out the answer. Madeleine spent the long hours of the short days of childhood in running the gamut of all the adjectives embraced by the lexicon of deportment and interior fittings; she was wilful and winsome, fair to behold but often ugly as to both appearance and temper, she condescended to authority, smiled with the wisdom of the serpent at blandishments, flirted delicately with man, rosebush or a brick wall and occasionally transformed her small body into a reservoir of rage and tears which threatened to burst its overstrained retaining walls. She, too, had already pricked her tiny fingers on the thorns of reality. Digby loved her with an abandonment, an unreasoning and completely surrendered affection such as man lays only at the feet of those qualities of mystery in woman which are eternal, knowing not age nor the divisions of birth and death.

To her surprising bodily strength and mental

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hunger fear was absolutely incomprehensible, a realization that had caused her father more anxiety than the combined exploring activities of the two other children. He had been afraid for her and had spent patient hours in trying to bring her to an appreciation of what would result should she tumble from the coping that divided Mountain Acre from the valley below. By endless repetition while holding her in the crook of his arm above the abyss he taught her the old nursery rhyme:

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
Not all the king’s horses, nor all the king’s men,
Could put Humpty Dumpty together again!”

But it was not until he secured an egg, stood it by the Columbus method on the inner edge of the balustrade, tipped it off to smash on the tiled floor of the gallery, pointed at the resulting mess and called it Madeleine, that her mildly interested eyes widened in sudden horror and overflowed with a gush of self-pitying and rebellious tears.

“*Not* Maddie!” she screamed, clutched his trousers at the knees, buried her face against his legs

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and jumped her nether portion up and down in an ideal position for spanking.

He had snatched her up, held her quivering body close and murmured with a comforting but self-addressed intensity, "No, not Madeleine! Never Madeleine, so held me God."

These memories flashed through Digby's mind in a fraction of the time it has taken to relate them; he returned now to the thought from which they had made their original departure, the sensing of the intrusion of reality between childhood and youth.

"Come here, you children," he called in a stage whisper.

Immediately Madeleine's fidgeting ceased, her body grew tense, her eyes concentrated on things about to be even though unseen and her lips half opened to the best disposal for silent breathing under stress. Laura and Junior drew their chairs near. Elbows on knees, chins cupped in hands, they entered the circle of conspiratory heads, their faces joining in an intentional withdrawal which wiped years away and left father, son, elder and younger daughter in a single ageless category.

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"Never forget old friends," whispered Digby. "I used to know a girl named Laura and a boy called Junior and a baby with the longest name in the world, Maddie-Madcap-Madeleine. One day I saw the three of them climbing a fence on the top of a hill. I stopped to light my pipe and when I looked up again they were gone. 'Pooh!' I said, 'that's easy. I'll climb the hill to find them.' I did and when I got there there wasn't any hill, no fence and not a child in sight."

He paused to let this surprising information sink in. "You can imagine," he continued, "that I was annoyed. Things like that are not supposed to happen to people who are thoroughly grown up; they make them ridiculous and impatient at the absurdity of seeing what isn't and realizing that if they really do see it, why it doesn't do any good to know that it isn't because it's just the same as if it was. In addition to being put out at myself I was worried. I couldn't afford to lose those children. There are plenty more in the world, but they aren't so easy to get as you might think because you have to buy a child every day for ten years before you own it.

"I looked everywhere I could think of, finally

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gave it up and came back here to the garden at Mountain Acre and started walking in circles like a yellow dog about to lie down. Just as I was really and truly going to give it up I heard a voice as thin as one string of a spider's web say quite distinctly, 'Never forget old friends.'

"'Where, what and who are you?' I asked, my hair standing on end.

"'Don't be alarmed, Richard, Sr.,' said the voice, 'I'm just your old friend, the rose janitress.'

"I was standing over there by the gate under the Etoile de France and when I turned I found a great red rose just under my nose; the voice was coming from the center of one of its petals. I stared and stared at the spot but I couldn't see anything for tobacco smoke until the voice asked, 'Can't you remember the rose janitress?'

"Then I realized that it wasn't smoke that blinded me, but the mist of years, so I blew it away and there I saw her just as she used to be. From the tips of her toes to the crown on her head she was no bigger than nothing at all; an ant could have stood over her without mussing her hair. Her bodice was cut disgracefully low; around her waist

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she had wrapped a caterpillar's eyelash three times and tied it in a bow knot; below that stood out fluffy skirts like the tiniest granddaughter of a peony upside down and under them were two perfectly straight and adorable legs with a dimple on each knee. You would never have taken her for a janitress if she hadn't carried a mop.

“Her cheeks were pink, her lips were red,
Her eyes as big as twice her head.’

“Extraordinarily bright, too,” he added to the doggerel, “but that was not to be wondered at when you consider that those eyes were the buckets into which she squeezed the dew that it was her business to mop up every morning early. My sight grew clearer and clearer and presently, all over the garden, wherever a drop of dew was left on a petal, I saw them at work, lily washladies, grassflower laundresses, honeysuckle bees-of-all-work and bachelor-button and sweet-william men-servants. When these last saw that I saw them they yelled in a chorus, ‘Hallo, old scout! Where you been?’

“‘Now look up on the hill,’ whispered the rose janitress.

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"I did. There was the hill, there was the fence with Junior, Laura and Madeleine climbing back over it and coming for me as tight as they could run.

" 'If you don't want to lose your children,' whispered the rose janitress hurriedly, 'and if they don't want to lose themselves, don't any of you ever dare forget old friends, least of all the Little Folk. Make fun of us if you like, don't believe in us if you can't, but if you're afraid of the dark you'd better keep us handy for we are the light that shines on yesterday.' "

"Set me a riddle, O, my son, for I am weary of the knowledge of all things."

"Where dwells the sky without a cloud?"

"Child, the world is round, the sky's about it; thy cloudless heaven is in the little eye of a man's head."

CHAPTER III

SUCH hours, in the meagre proportion of one in every twenty-four, were merely the gossamer bloom on the heavy warp and woof of Digby's daily existence. He was a worker ravenous of accomplishment; his far-sighted eyes beheld the Pico mine as a pilgrimage stretching out into the years, but not as a non-stop journey along a lane without a turning. All its stages were clearly defined in his mind from the initial crude departure of material installation and the rush to handle ore in paying quantities to the time of first approximate leisure to be harnessed promptly to chemical analyses and experiment. That field in itself is without end, but it did not limit his vision which was fixed beyond on an ultimate dream of levels too deep for profit to-day, but which must inevitably creep up to the reaching hand of delving science.

It gave him a sense of sharing in omnipotence to gaze upon the mounds of tailings abandoned by the experts of another generation and to feel that he

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could summon all its progeny who flocked to the welcome wages he proffered, assure them of the presence of gold in plenteous though undazzling quantity, give it to them in illusive fee-simple and yet leave them destitute, famine-stricken, by his single withdrawal. Pay from such leadership became more truly largess than from any purely industrial manufactory however hedged its appliances by patented genius and mechanical intricacy.

The peons who thronged to the standard of voluntary labour which he had raised on the barren mountainside were alternately the bane of his hunger for achievement and the object of a social-philosophic questing that was gradually becoming his medium of relaxation to the wonder and amusement of his wife, Mary. Lucent-orbed, dark-skinned, black-haired, soft-footed and as slow as a deep, sluggish stream, they flowed before him like a river weary from long travel and brooding lazily in its murky depths over the possibilities of a flood to hurry it along. No people as a class could be more gentle, more absorbed in momentary well-being, apparently more content with minimum benefits; and while Digby like all active men accepted the present

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at its face value he was not ignorant of the past nor incapable of making deductions from deliberate retrospection when time and the inclination synchronized.

He knew these men; a single glance was enough to enable him to segregate pure Indian from mestizo, mestizo from impoverished Latin white-trash. The Indian stock was in an overwhelming majority and unmistakable not only by reason of its unvarying black eyes and blacker hair, coarse, straight and heavy as a horse's mane, but also because it carried in its composite countenance a look that was the equal inheritance of age-long subjugation and frequent revolt, the faintly smouldering expression of all oppressed peoples, the unbroken continuity of which alone dignifies them above thoroughly domesticated animals.

Against this sombre background the mestizos showed like gnarls in a rough but even web. The alien blood in their veins whether descended from black or white tended to dull their features while it sharpened their wits. Their hair was drabbed and twisted, their skin lacked the thick smoothness and their cheeks the almost universal roundness and

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smothered red glow from deep beneath the surface which distinguished the pure native. Their eyes, subject to emotional flashes of astonishing intensity, never attained to the fixed, impenetrable blackness of cut jet. Digby could make a surprisingly expert mechanic of any one of them in six weeks; in six years none of them could win his trust.

Their proportion to the mass of labour he employed was small but still outnumbered by twenty to one the few pure whites who had drifted to the new camp which demanded no references beyond arms and legs sound enough for the day's work, and as is the way of pioneering enterprise blindly asked no questions of past or future. Such whites, not to be confused with certain imported foremen and a group of native professional miners, were to him the lowest of all his workmen in the scale of dignity. They were degenerates, scobs pared from the hard timber of centuries of dominance, weaklings cast off from the warring factions of an iron class which for generations had climbed to power on the backs of peons perennially deluded to revolt only to be despoiled with a wearying redundancy of fate.

These outcasts gleamed here and there like dying

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sparks from which fire would not deign to spring. They showed a cheap vivacity, a willingness to trade on their degradation, an aptitude for pander and for bullying not by strength but through tradition; even their swashbuckling turned quickly to cringing weakness at a frown. "Hawks, wing-clipped," thought Digby, "and soiling their claws with carrion." Thin-faced and sallow, shifty-eyed, nervous, impressionable, they were the first to respond to an appeal for effort and the first, by much, to drop the sudden load.

From such a racial conglomeration Digby welded the manual organization with which to build his superstructure of inanimate appliances; derricks, anchorages, head-gears, concrete foundations, mill sheds, process tanks and the vault-like zinc-room, all rough, ponderous and strictly utilitarian, allied to the mountain almost as intimately as its gray ribs of rock and seeming to stand aloof from the congenital instability of their actual creators. Under his scheme the mass of workmen fell into natural divisions: the out and out peons stood for brute weight, burden bearers, hod-carriers, pick and shovel graders; the mestizos for improvised masons, me-

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chanics and blasters; the white-trash for gossipers, tale-bearers conscious of the value of their secret wares in an industry which has never yet attained to victory over dull wits intent on pilfering. Standing quite apart was the small group of professional miners from the north marked by a traditional independence.

There is a blessed fever which assails all men, even habitual laggards, at the initiation of any visibly growing material project, inciting them to a peculiar curiosity that demands certain stages of achievement for its satisfaction. Digby constantly played on this useful human failing throughout the constructive period, assigning set jobs to various gangs and deliberately spreading the impression that upon the culmination of all these tasks hung the inauguration of the aerial ropeway. Even as far back as his consultations with Ellerton on equipment he had instinctively seen in this feature a trump card which would appeal unfailingly to the imaginative and lazy and had stood out for the more expensive installation of two fixed wire cables and an endless hauling rope as against a single-line shoot.

"I don't see it," Ellerton had objected, "not at the price."

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"Well, I do," Digby had insisted, "and I'll show you. We'll have a carrying capacity of ten tons against three, we'll cut our power bill by balancing down loads against the up and we'll start work on time when we get the thing going by making the town men who miss the five o'clock skip climb the hill. Last and first, it will be a bunch of fresh-mown hay for me to dangle before the donkey noses of the construction gangs. Have you forgotten the power for good of a new toy?"

"You win four times over," Ellerton had agreed with a laugh and as the work progressed his acquiescence was fully justified. The completion of the ropeway, cleverly manipulated by Digby to depend on the more or less simultaneous termination of half a dozen tasks of far greater importance, became to the men an outstanding landmark of accomplishment out of all proportion to its intrinsic and comparative value. The gang with the best record was to have the first ride.

After five years Digby could look back on those months of sheer toil with deep satisfaction and a sense of wonder at what now seemed prodigies of success in distilling a mild essence of enthusiasm for work out of a mass that had since gone sour and

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settled down to a sodden level of minimum exertion which still was sufficient, however, to produce an even and reasonable flow of results.

In judging others he did not spare himself; routine had him also in its clutch, but as he went his daily systematic rounds he was conscious of regret for that hard time of happy fever which had made his present road so easy. Passing one morning from the wicket gate within the arch of the privet hedge which opened on the beaten, unadorned path to the mine, he stopped as he turned the sharp corner of the mountain buttress at a point from which he could view the plant whose construction had led through eager turmoil to a smooth and slumberous security.

Well above the level of his eyes rose the hoisting plant and the clumsily constructed landing-stage sticking out like an eyebrow from the edge of the hill and which with staccato rumblings and rhythmical puffs of dust was feeding ore from the bins beneath it into the skips. A man stood on a small platform lazily releasing the chute-door with a lever as the buckets swung into place; other men could be seen moving slowly about, digging, disappearing

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into tunnels, reappearing behind truck barrows, attaching them to an endless rope and languidly watching them run down the Decauville railway to the landing-stage, strike the tippie and dump their loads.

The big iron buckets dangled in a widely spaced string down the steep mountainside and led his eyes to the main plant looking absurdly minute at the foot of the ropeway where the incessant muffled roar of the stamps made a steady underlay of sound, a pool of commotion, in the vast silence of the open spaces visible from his point of vantage. He sighed as he remembered the exigencies arising from the smallness of capital which had forced the placing of the mill at the base of the main slope and beyond a gully which had made a wooden chute impracticable. Both he and Ellerton would have liked to have had it at the mine's door but that would have entailed the overcoming of tremendous difficulties in the way of transportation of heavy pieces and great expense in blasting and leveling.

"It couldn't be helped," he murmured to himself as he started on toward the landing-stage, but his eyes glowed with vision of what might soon be. The

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Pico mine, in a modest way, had made good; it had been a paying concern from the first month of operation. The outside capital which had originally come in purely by faith and on the strength of the reputation of the two partners had gained confidence and was ready to contribute to a wider development. Even now Digby was engaged in making soundings, clearing old tunnels, exploring pinched-out reefs and testing his results. He was not in a hurry; all was going well and he could give months to making sure and never regret the time thus spent.

He arrived at the landing-stage, swung himself into an empty skip and leaning from its edge to avoid cable and hauling rope, stood with head uptilted to drink in the never-palling view of the golden valley which stretched away to the left. Absorbed in that distant prospect, the foothills seemed to rise toward him rather than he descend to them, finally usurping his attention; for no sooner did he arrive at the foot of the ropeway than he felt suddenly diminished; foothills became mountains and the mill a roaring giant fed by the sweating labours of pygmy men.

He passed through every division of the plant,

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looked into the power room, watched the crushers at work, studied their feed into the ore bins and from there to the feeder tables and finally to the stamps, hung over the swirling process vats and talked with foremen, mechanics and an occasional labourer in whom some gleam of intelligence above the low average had awakened speculation as to his possibilities. As he crossed the frail bridge to the long zinc-room which in contrast to all surrounding structures was built of solid masonry and had its small windows stoutly barred, his eyes fell on a mestizo, Pablo by name, who with a helper was squatted under the shadow of the mill in the midst of a snake-like swirl of wire cables. He stopped to watch him, caught his eye and raised a hand in a wave of friendly greeting; Pablo nodded but did not release his grip on rope and marlin spike.

All these men were underpaid, Pablo more so than any other; Digby knew it. He was no altruist to the point of self-destruction, but he was a fair man willing to reap only where he had sowed. In his heart of hearts he would have been glad to raise his entire wage-scale had he not been deterred by that sixth sense which comes to practical men who have

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learned a local and alien psychology not by scholastic reasoning but through a series of very real and rude awakenings.

Theoretically he should have said to Pablo, "There is no camp in the world where you are not worth ten dollars a day so I am going to pay it to you here." Had he done so he would soon have lost the only wire-rope splicer in a vast region, added one to the corps of town drunkards and planted active misery in a humble home now slumbering on the edge of but beyond the borders of actual discontent. So with the rest of the skilled men who received remuneration in excess of the common horde but still far below their worth; he did not speculate as to why he could not better their lot spontaneously, he only knew it, felt it by acquired instinct.

Unbeknown to himself he was even at that day face to face with an unseen truth, the fact that man's relation to benefits is not that of a sponge to water but one of wearying evolution, of attainment measured by his power of assimilation, of perception of injustice and of battle for satisfaction which must yet stop just short of destruction of the sources of

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welfare or defeat its own end. The fate of a man manacled by ignorance and the inhibitions of arrested development from whatever cause thrown into a sea of gold and of a cat in a weighted bag plunged into a hogshead of water have ever been one and the same; they will both drown.

Digby's conscience was alive to a sense of wrong but not to one of wrong-doing; it was not uneasy, largely because the value of these men above their fellows was in great part of his own creation. In that day, so briefly removed in point of years from present times, gratitude still entered into calculations of justice and an individual's immediate estate, irrespective of class-consciousness, was not assumed to be divorced from its past in every calculation of increasing demands.

As a result it took the cockles from Digby's heart to watch Pablo and let his own mind run to further recollections of those first days when he had picked his material as one would sort likely colts from a herd and himself broken it to this and that mechanical need. He had aspired to omniscience and if by chance some mechanism threatened to stump his pre-

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eminence he had gladly sat up a night with catalogues, specifications and directions like a teacher put to it to keep ahead of his class.

Pablo's was more than a case in point; it went beyond the reach of book-learning into a combined realm of dexterity, common sense and brute force. Digby had picked him as showing these three qualifications in excess of his fellows and had spent a week in overalls at his side, first with lengths of a six-stranded manilla hawser and then with sections of the wire rope a little over four inches in circumference, of six strands of twelve wires each, hemp heart and centers, which was to be the size most in use at the Pico mine. For the hawser, employed purely as an optical illustration, their hands and a wooden pin had sufficed but when it came to manipulating the wire rope they had been forced to improvise a marlin spike of chilled tool-steel and resort to a vise and nippers.

Never would Digby forget the interest that the big, somber-eyed mestizo had taken in every step of the arduous process nor his own feeling of conquest when at the end of a week of lacerated hands and continual backache he could at last straighten up

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and say, "You see, Pablo? It's badly done; it's rough work, but every turn is right, every plait in place. Make a smooth one like the hawser there and I'll double your pay."

"For always?" asked the peon doubtingly.

"For always," confirmed Digby with a smile.

Pablo had glanced at the clean splice of the hawser, touched lightly with his stubby fingers the crude inequalities of the work they had just finished and nodded his big head slowly but comprehendingly. "It is well," he said. Within a month he had become an expert wire-rope splicer, that rarest of all journeymen who once uprooted from his habitat poises frequently but never settles, led on by the will-o'-the-wisp of ready gold gleaming from every spot on the broad earth where men toil with the implements of giants. Unwittingly he held in his roughened hands a valuable but dangerous gift from Digby, his well-wisher.

Digby turned from staring at him and walked thoughtfully to the locked and barred door of the zinc-room; he opened it and entered the holy of holies of the mine. Along one side beneath two of the small windows stood a rough deal table

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strewn with samples of precipitate, crucibles, retorts and all the paraphernalia of process investigation; on the walls above it were plastered formulas and charts; stretching away into dim shadows was the battery of zinc-boxes. Here he had spent many happy hours engrossed in manipulations of oxidizing agents, potassium ferricyanide, sodium, manganese dioxides, into combinations far above the reach and interest of the lay mind. He was master of a small mine, he stood alone, and was as subject to endless obligations as a country general practitioner of the old school; the tenacity of slimes and tailings in retaining that last imbedded corpuscle of gold, invisible to the naked eye, was to him the arch enemy as worthy of pursuit as the most recondite and formidable microbe.

It was an understood thing at Mountain Acre that if he did not appear on the stroke of twelve, he was not to be expected for lunch and many were the days upon which this rule saved the household from long fasting. There is only one kind of work that will make a man forget food and it is found in that activation of the mind upon which is based the fertile illusion of its ultimate mastery over matter and

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which is intimately allied to the nebulous sources of sheer creation. The artist, he who with tool or pen or brush or mortar and pestle is engaged in the production of that which he believes will live, alone is fed by unseen ravens and stands, a silent bulwark, against the embattled materialistic forces of the forty-two-hour week and minimum production for maximum pay.

With Digby, however, the unseen ravens were sometimes displaced by Patrick Hogan, his right-hand man. Pat was no technician, he knew nothing of the why and wherefore of this and that in the intricate recovery of gold from low-grade ores, but he had a keen perception for results and the driving-power of a born overseer as well as an occult faculty for transmitting to his underlings the essence of a near-blasphemy acquired through wide wanderings and of ironic Gaelic wit without the aid of actual translation into an alien idiom. Big, rawboned, wide-eyed, loose-mouthed and violent, he yet possessed a tender heart which would often lead him to seek out Digby, bearing an offering of food on a shining bit of banana leaf.

"Will you not be having an *enchilayda*, sor? It's

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me missus itself that watched to make them and they be clane."

Digby would invariably accept the proffered *enchilada* or *tamale*, which Pat's incorrigible tongue enunciated as "taymayly," with an absent-minded nod of thanks, often ate the titbit subconsciously but sometimes laid it aside and when he finally knocked off work was put to it to cover up his gastronomical delinquency without giving offense.

About the mill were grouped two or three dwellings and half a dozen shacks which were occupied by the imported foremen and labour but the vast majority of the peons had been recruited from the neighbouring town and came to their work more or less daily, frequent absences being ascribed to deaths in the family, but in reality due to the low price of *pulque*.

Pat occupied with his wife the most pretentious of the houses which was placed facing the zinc-room and at such a short distance that the roaring of the stamps would have been deafening to ears less trained by long usage; his had attained to an amazing capacity for elimination which entirely ignored all sounds attributable to the proper functioning of

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the mill but left them peculiarly sensitive to any ominous silence or the prowlings of interlopers. He owned a sawed-off shotgun of short range but warranted to hit everything within an angle of ninety degrees and which for some occult reason he had named, "Ne'er-do-weel's fayther."

"I don't see it, Pat," said Digby to him one day. "If you'd call it *stepfather*, now—"

"What for will I call it stepfayther thin, Mither Digby, and it to be me best friend?"

Far was it from him to explain and much farther from Digby to guess the involved connection between saving parent and spendthrift son, a blunderbus and the ancient saying, "A narrow gathering, a broad scattering."

Pat was not above formally visiting the stables at Mountain Acre on Sunday afternoons and giving careful inspection to the horses, the cow and the pigs. This was no part of his duty as one could see by the deepening of the blue in his eyes but rather a weekly journey by the road of old familiar contacts and smells to a far country. No sooner did the wicket gate click at his passage than the children would be around him, catching his hands, matching

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his step along the pergola and down the driveway, all silent; Junior intent on learning more things about horses, Laura hoping for fairy lore whispered with a fervour of faith that would "raise the hair on a hen's egg," and Madeleine engrossed with thoughts of her rabbits which had once induced a tale of weasels and hares wherein the latter in self-protection had learned to sleep with one eye only "an' when that was rested and slep enough, they opened it and shut the other."

Once Pat had passed the stable, barnyard and sty in sober review and berated their shiftless attendants with language intrinsically innocent but violent which the children had no need to translate, they would gather on barrels, fodder-bin or the floor and hear how Katty got out of the pot or any one of a thousand thousand other tales, for Hogan was a well possessed of the unfathomable depths of an ancient people eternally young, a spring that bubbled hoary fantasies as delicate as a thrush's ankle, light narrative that one could blow off the hand and lose save as a lasting perfume on memory.

Laura and Junior were not so young as to be ignorant of a flaw in the complacent armour of their

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big friend nor so spiritless as to spare him weekly darts directed at the aperture; so, when story-time was over and they were on the way to repay him with a dish of "tay" and half an hour of Mrs. Digby's company on the terrace, they would ask him, round-eyed and serious, "How is Mrs. Hogan, Pat? Couldn't she come up with you to-day?"

To which Pat would automatically reply, "Why then she has the fever on her still; she eats any more than a midge in the Glen of Downs, she's speechless and kilt with the fasting."

"Perhaps mother will take us down to see her," Laura would murmur, her eyes slanted to observe Pat's face.

"Aree!" he would reply sadly, "itself can see no one the day, aroon."

Nobody had ever seen the Mrs. Hogan of Pat's unfailing spoken solicitude and respect. Though he always referred to his missus as merely superintending the preparation of the food which he occasionally offered to Digby, it was an open secret that he had married a native lady of humble origin who at the time of the contract already had a good many nicks to her horn, but for all her age and per-

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haps by reason of it was a mistress of the local culinary art.

Pat on the terrace was another man; gone were fantasies from his mind and light speech from his tongue. Whether the Digbys were alone or whether Ellerton and some of his friends had come down for the week-end and with occasional visitors crowded the cool tiled gallery, he took his tea with equal solemnity and seldom spoke unless he was directly addressed; even then his mouth opened only to sententious maxims or verbatim repetitions of some previously rendered report.

Digby never tired of trying to draw him out. "What was it you were telling me about the cat, Pat?"

"It was this way, sor," Hogan complied solemnly. "The cat was in an empty skip an' the spalpeen of a peon opens the chute an' kilt the poor baste dead with a load of ore an' then when it crawled out half-way down the ropeway to the cable, screeching an' squalling an' caterwauling, they let the next bucket run down on the top of it an' murdered it entirely so that it would have died inside the week

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for all its nine lives if the missus herself hadn't nursed it the night long."

"And what did you say to the gear-tender?" asked Digby when the general laughter was over.

"I towld him," replied Pat, apparently unmoved, "he wasn't fit to mind mice at a crossroads and that if ever he did the kind again I'd bate his four bones into a frog's jelly, comb his hair with the creepy stool and murther the mother's sowl of him."

Mountain Acre was so near to the City that Ellerton found frequent opportunity to stop off two or three days on his way from one company property to another and visit it. At first his comings were more or less forced by problems in which Digby required his assistance, but as the years passed by and the mine settled to a steady productive routine he came more and more often partly because he had done well for himself and had greater liberty and partly because there was a charm, a security, a sense of clean rest about the Digby house which acted on him like a lodestone.

He was younger than his partner by eight years, attractive, well-to-do and as a consequence sub-

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jected in an unusual degree to the temptations which assail such a man in a society relaxed from home ties and home morals by the mere fact of a too-sudden rise, both as to prosperity and numbers, in an alien atmosphere. There are foreign colonies of slow growth that work themselves into the weave of the country of their location, choose the best in a studied environment and gradually wed tradition to tradition but the element of his compatriots in which Ellerton mostly moved was not that of the scattered many who had actually sent down new roots but of the spectacular few who had the air of picnickers on a holiday.

There were times when he could be gay with the gayest but on occasion he would awake to thoughts of Mountain Acre as of a green oasis in a desert of dead ashes, a quiet well of cool water where the thirst of the heart for those fundamental and simple things upon which his generation had been nursed to vigour could be appeased even though it were never sated. On such days he would drop whatever he was doing, take to horse or train or more recently to motor and cover the intervening miles in an impatience hard to reconcile with his usual careless mood.

"Father, I see a smile upon the face of the Earth."

"Hush! my son. Some mortal hath read a message."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE the children were young, young enough
to be taken on the knee and ridden breathless
to the beat of a rhyme of Pat's teaching,

“How many miles to Dub-el-in?
Three score and tin.
Will we be there by candle-light?
Yes, and back ag'in!
Hupp, hupp, my little horse,
Hupp, hupp, ag'in!”

Ellerton enjoyed them without any reservation but when they attained to what grown-ups term the awkward age and the young inarticulately regarded as the epoch of duration vile during which within prison bars they make acquaintance with books, teachers and the metronome, he was conscious of impatience at the rigid rules of tasks and silence and even in the hours when these were suspended felt himself to be a partner in the shyness which comes to youth along with lanky, uncovered shanks.

During this period he rather shunned Mountain

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Acre. He did not analyze the reason; had he done so he would have found it rooted in his limitations as a bachelor who is without the capacity for sympathy with that orderly, humdrum, even and arduous interim which divides inconsequence from purpose in children's lives and sets for the span of each the unmistakable hallmark of the home.

These drowsy days of first instruction were not without their underlay of charm to the initiated, however; Mary loved them, sharing with Digby revelations little in themselves but epochal when illumined by that most poignant of the cries of wonder, "Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone."

She herself taught the girls to play and here came across the fact that there is a rock in the composition of every human being, however unformed, soft, animate and seemingly malleable to outside influence, the mile-stone that marks the spot where even the worm will turn. The look that would settle like a pall on Madeleine's features when at the age of seven she was placed on a book-raised stool before the piano was more than legible, it flamed in livid words; conventionally toned down and translated it would read somewhat as follows: "Damn!

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Dod blast my splinters and the old cat's eye! Silly, silly, silly: one, two, three, bang! 'Bang! BANG!'

The oscillating finger of the metronome aggravated her to a point where rage could no longer be contained and one day her mother came upon her on the terrace just too late to save the hated instrument from being hurled over the balustrade, down and down, to crash far below to the accompaniment of a single word from Madeleine.

"Humpty!" she grunted and turned to take her licking.

After a curtain consultation that night broken frequently by the admonition, "Dick! Dick! Don't laugh so loud," it was decided that for the comfort of all and in the name of common sense Madeleine was to be informed on the following morning that she might never, never again, play the piano. So solemn was the pronouncement of sentence that she cried as though her heart were broken but strangely enough obeyed the injunction, spirit and letter, from that day on.

In marked contrast Laura would sit at the piano by the hour, not always playing, sometimes dreaming, sometimes clasping trembling and inexpert fin-

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gers in an agony of thwarted aspiration. More than once she, too, broke into tears, wept softly for the longing that was in her to bruise nothing beautiful and for the impatience which overwhelmed her desire. At such moments her mother would carry her away and pet her.

"There, there, darling, don't I know how it is? Don't I? You mustn't cry; soon you'll forget your fingers, dear, and they'll be chasing your dreams all up and down the keys."

That prophecy was fulfilled and as a result before long Mary passed beyond her pedagogic depth; she was fortunate to be able to secure an excellent teacher from the near-by town, a young woman, an artist who had crawled into that soft clime to die and found life too lingering sweet to quite let go. She was an unassuming person too withdrawn to impose a rule on recalcitrant pupils but tuned to meet Laura's very need.

For daily lessons of a more practical nature the children were handed over to Miss Downs, an English spinster who lived in the home yet to the casual observer appeared to be no more a part of it than the stranger within its gates. The exact opposite

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was true; Miss Downs had so built herself into the establishment that she was as unnoticeable as its walls or oaken floors. She was studiously colourless in looks and in deportment, generically incapable of an intrusion, deliberately devoid of expressed opinion; silently, completely given over to the efficient performance of her duties. Upon meeting her one remarked nothing of note but he who once knew her despairs of depicting her in a paragraph. She was in herself a volume of humanity, a national monument to the finished art of minding one's own affairs.

It was her business to ground the children thoroughly in primary knowledge, to watch over their deportment, to tone down their voices and to teach them to distinguish Americanisms without obliterating them. Nothing could have exceeded the absolute judicial impartiality with which she would say, "In England we say of meat that it is underdone; in America you call it rare. They mean the same." Or, "In England we call any footwear that comes above the ankle a boot but when you say boot you mean something that covers the calf of the leg."

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In the face of many transgressions she never inflicted or requested from the children's parents corporal punishment; she knew only perseverance. With never a variation she called Laura, My Dear; Madeleine, Darling, and Junior, Richard. Lacking a home of her own, her room became her castle and into it she retired when her duties were done or her solitary walk over, never imposing her influence beyond the confines of the house and her specifically allotted hours.

It is hard to overestimate the grip acquired through years of such unvarying deportment; in its long run it was bound to inculcate respect without fear, solid friendship without demonstration of affection and a pondered recognition of fairness in big and little things as the foundation of that loyalty which is the flower, *par excellence*, on Anglo-Saxon tradition. Poor, unasking Miss Downs! She and her rare counterparts are of the steel girders of the earth, destined to be buried but in master masonry.

Once released from their lessons the children were free of Mountain Acre and its immediate environments save only the unattractive path to the

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mine. They would play about the garden, the stables or along the driveway but tended to gather sooner or later at the back of the house where there was a veritable colony of native dependents. Here congregated Maria, the cook, an ogress subject to occasional softenings of the heart; Maria Chica, her assistant; Paula, Innocencia and Chucha, once individual nurses to the three youngsters, now promoted to the category of housemaids and laundress; Pancho, the gardener, and a nameless helper; finally, at varying hours of the day, all the relations of the above to the third generation and the fifteenth degree of cousinship.

In vain had Mrs. Digby fought against age-long custom and precedent in kitchen hospitality; it was as futile to warn off the courteous, mild-mannered, soft-speeched throng as to shoo chickens away from an unprotected heap of grain; it returned with smiling, unwearying persistence. She could only fall back on the expedient of doling out her servants' strictly measured rations of beans, flour, meat allowance and sugar daily and saving her nerves by refraining from deliberate excursions to the rear of the house.

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So silent were the comings and goings of both the domestics at their duties and the visitors who flitted into the yard and away like shadows of ghosts scorched dark by the sun that the peace of Mountain Acre was never disturbed to those who were content to avoid the servants' restricted quarters, drinking their fill of the quietude of the darkened rooms, of the warm drowsy terrace or of the sun-flecked garden. But for the children the afternoon hour of village gossip, of the incessant pittapattling of *tortillas*, of the pungent odours of *chili-con-carne*, *frijoles* or a rare *mole verde* in preparation or of the skilful rolling of *enchiladas*, all foods which occasionally found their way to the family table but robbed of the *aperitif* of open braziers and watering mouths, was pregnant with excitement to every one of their five senses. They looked longingly at the coarse provender they were strictly forbidden to share and joined freely in the chatter, flattered by the lazy, good-natured consideration of all warm-climbed peoples for the words of a child.

Such epochs end in point of duration however lasting the stamp they leave upon their product and the day came when Miss Downs' mission at least

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to that family was done and Mrs. Digby could soften the break to herself and to the children in the excitement of a journey home, long pondered and discussed, but which seemed nevertheless drastic and swift in its execution. She came back without the youngsters; even little Madeleine, now ten years old, was left behind to attend school under the guardianship of pleased and sadly deluded grandparents. From that time on Mary appeared to herself and her husband to be constantly packing for a journey or unpacking from another; a trip to fetch the children, another to take them back, still another because she was heartsick and one made with the deliberate purpose of giving the baby of the family a spanking she would not forget in a year of Sundays.

During these comings and goings and long absences Ellerton came back into his own; every week-end and holiday that found him within reach he spent at Mountain Acre, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by four or five men of the same stamp as Digby and himself, long limbed or tubby but all bronzed, cool of eye and steady of hand, men who had gambled with fate and could yet find

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deep solace in those emblems of nationality, a game of penny-ante or double pinochle at a quarter a hundred.

Weightier matters, however, were not lost to view and as a result a memorable week in the autumn of 1906 brought two representatives from the capital which had backed the Pico mine to decide definitely by conference on the spot on matters of far-reaching importance. The four men spent as many days in overalls; they crawled through half-obstructed levels, descended on a rope-sling shafts long unused, took samples of reef from deep workings, studied the geological formation, argued hotly as to its true reading with regard to breaks and pinched leads, made assays and studied for hours the life chart of the enterprise to date. When every source of tangible evidence had been clawed with a fine-toothed comb Powel, the elder of the two visitors, broke a long silence with a single question.

"You believe in it, Ellerton?"

"I believe in it so solidly," replied Ellerton, "that I'm going to break all rules and tumble all the eggs I can reach into this one basket."

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"And you?" asked Powel, turning to Digby.

Digby's eyes assumed the same concentrated glow which had come to them when Ellerton had first sprung the project of the Pico mine; only now it burned with an added almost fanatical intensity as if the question were an aspersion on the stability, worth and promise of that which he had built with his own hands, bathed with the daily sweat of his brow and inspired with the breath of life. He felt, besides, the tugging of that bond of sympathy which links the master-builder to his creation, endows the inanimate with attributes of benevolence and imposes a mutual loyalty.

"I go Rox one better," he said hoarsely. "I wager what money I've got, wife and children."

"That settles it," said Powel soberly. "If we lose, we lose in damned good company."

Digby could not sleep that night; his mind bored into the mountain, sank shafts, ran tunnels, opened levels and finally raised a monstrous mill that escaped its control, swelled and rose until it threatened to out-tower Babel and crash to its own and the dreamer's destruction. In a vain effort to calm his spirit he impelled his thoughts far afield until they

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swept in review the whole course of an awakening so wide-spread that the Pico mine became dwarfed to the proportions of a mere hanger-on at the small end of a mighty procession.

During twenty years his compatriots had poured money into this country at the rate of fifty millions a year. Rough-tongued, rough-handed, uncouth to the eye and ear, they had yet constructed the cleanest roads known to railway history the world over, resurrected mines, established smelters, built foundries, factories, breweries and all unconsciously played the rôle of Frankenstein, created in a land of almost universal bondage a new class, produced a social rebirth of that which had not existed in the memory of the living, brought to life the wage-earner who received payment for his labour in cash and not in credit against the debts of his forebears.

“And it’s only the beginning,” murmured Digby aloud, staring wide-eyed at the shadowy ceiling. None knew better than he the extent of fertile unplanted valleys, the bodies of untouched ore locked behind barriers of transportation, the millions of cattle without a market, the wealth of primeval forests and the broad field still barren of industries. He

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felt the pride of a communion, a oneness, with a vast surge of human prosperity, and gloried as had his forefathers in the silent, deep-seated emotion of the pioneer.

On the following day he summoned Mary, who had gone to the City on the pretext of urgent shopping but in reality to give the four men a free hand, release them from the exigencies of shaving, dressing and generally being polite while engrossed with matters intimately allied to the soil, old clothes and an occasional emphatic oath. She returned in time to shine as hostess during two days of quiet but none the less fervid rejoicing over a consummation pregnant with possibilities.

The evening of the day when Ellerton, Powel and his companion took their departure was one of penetrating silences. The silence of accustomed voices recently withdrawn, of footsteps echoing in memory, of drooping trees, drenching moonlight, creeping shadows, pale snows and silver-ribboned waters afar, entered into Digby's very soul as he gripped the balustrade of the terrace, diffused his sense of entity, wafted it out and away to partake of the cup of universal knowledge. Suddenly he straightened with

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a quick turn of his head toward Mary, who was sitting near by watching him with a tender yet quizzical intensity.

"You didn't hear it, of course," he said with a faint unreadable smile.

"Hear what, Dick?" asked Mary, her brows puckering to a troubled frown.

"The voice of the valley," said Digby, still smiling. "Do you remember what I told you, Polly? That it had a secret, a vast secret, and that I would never rest till I'd read it? It spoke to me just now. I—I made it speak."

"And what did it say?"

"The earth is of the body of God."

"That's blasphemous," said Mary quickly, her lips a proxy for her ancestors.

"No," said Digby calmly but frowning in concentration, "I haven't got all its meaning yet, but there's more to it than that. The crowding of so much beauty into the insignificant angle of a man's eye can be a symbol beyond blasphemy. I guess such things go by feeling."

Mary arose and came close to him; a sense of sudden loneliness possessed her as though a single deep

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moment unshared were enough to open a chasm between her heart and his. She looked not at the valley but into his eyes as she whispered, "Dick, I feel it too. Indeed I do."

His smiling eyes filled suddenly with moisture, he forgot all but her tender anxiety, caught her in his arms and held her tightly. "Mary, my darling," he murmured, "I love you. You know that I love you."

For one such moment after long association with any woman a man may go on his knees and thank God. Digby was not conscious of reverence but he knew that he was happy beyond the just allotment to any individual; consequently it was almost as an earnest to his fatalism that a cablegram arrived on the following day laconically announcing the suspension of Madeleine from school a fortnight before the close of the term. From herself came a characteristic supplementary message: "Don't worry why they promised to let me tell it myself."

Ten days later came a letter from the head-mistress of the school addressed to Mary. She read it eagerly, her eyes turned absurdly blank and then flashed angrily. "Dick, what do you think of this?"

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Listen. 'My dear Mrs. Digby. We have been forced to suspend Madeleine; when she confesses to you as she has promised to do, you will know why we could take no other course, why I despair of telling you about it by letter, why we will be glad to receive her again in the fall and above everything else why we love her behind her back.' "

"Is that all?" asked Digby.

"Every word except the 'cordially yours,' etc.," replied Mary. "What does she mean? What *does* she mean?"

"There, there, now," warned Digby, "if you begin that way curiosity will be picking the bones of what's left of you by the time Madeleine gets here."

"I'm *not* curious," declared Mary, angry tears in her eyes. "My own baby!"

"Now, Mary," said Digby in a tone he seldom used, "you read the thing over again. It's a mighty clever letter, comforting from start to finish and just means that Madeleine, true to form, has invented some entirely new breed of scrape which can't be described in the mails."

"Dick!" cried Mary horrified, but with lips tempted to smile, "how can you say such a thing."

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"I don't mean what you think," hedged Digby hurriedly. "What I meant is that the words that would make the matter clear aren't available yet to the general public and won't be until Madeleine releases them."

Mary thought soberly for a while and then deliberately faced about within herself and arrived at a decision of patience; during the three weeks that intervened before Digby was to depart to meet the three children who were coming by steamer to the nearest port chaperoned by friends of the family she never once reopened the subject.

"My dear," said Digby as he kissed her good-by, "you are wonderful. I could almost promise not to let her tell me until we get back."

"Don't be silly," said Mary, giving him smile for smile. "Now go or you'll miss the train."

Two days later as he stood on the wharf and looked up at his children crowding excitedly to the rail of the steamer Digby felt a pride that for a moment usurped the rightful place of affection. They had more than the beauty of youth; character, distinction and each an individuality which he alone could read in the light of all the years of their lives.

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Laura, though only nineteen, had come into the full legacy of womanhood; she was as old to-day as she would ever be. Her expression was one of sweetness that would live beyond knowledge because her heart was born choked with tenderness for every thing that suffers.

To look upon Junior's face, resolute, round-cheeked, warm-lipped but blatantly young, it was difficult to believe that he had already passed his examinations for college with flying colours. There was a shy light in his eyes of questioning before the door of life overlaid by a brazen stare which pretended to the world that if he had not seen all dark things he at least knew about them. Close beside him, one hand on his shoulder, stood Madeleine in a cloud of tumbled hair, light as the breezes that frolicked with it. Her cheeks were a flame of subtly changing colour, her lips were red, mobile, closing and parting as though to kiss good-by each regretted passing breath of the joy of being. She was just fifteen; kittens played in her eyes, mischievous, demure, sometimes still, abnormally still, waiting to pounce. As they met her father's gaze they flashed defiance and then suddenly melted to a

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look of heartrending wistfulness that brought a lump to his throat.

On the way to the train she snuggled up to him and whispered, "Not here, Daddy, not to-day. At Mountain Acre,—sometime."

He pressed her arm in silent understanding, waited and persuaded Mary to wait for five long days. Mrs. Digby yielded to one temptation and felt ashamed of her weakness the moment after; she asked Laura in an hour when they were alone if she or Junior had learned what had happened. Laura's steady eyes tenderly amused had brought a quick flush to her mother's cheeks and swift repentance to her heart. She felt a culprit, immeasurably younger than her daughter.

"I'm sorry I said anything, dear," she whispered hurriedly. "Don't tell."

"Why, Mother darling," cried Laura with a soft laugh. "There's simply not a thing to tell. There never was a girl like Madeleine. Not a word, not one single word and Junior after her day and night for a solid week!"

Five long days during which the house and all it contained seemed hung in suspension by a thread

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and in danger of falling with a crash at a laugh, a loud word or even a too expressive sigh and then at night, just after dinner, Madeleine grew restless, walked with sharp turns on the terrace, suddenly approached her father, caught his hand and laid her cheek against his shoulder. "It's so lovely and still and dark in the garden, Daddy."

He went with her swiftly, with never a look back at Mary and the older children who might quite pardonably have burst into screams at this harbinger of imminent deliverance from long waiting. He did not let Madeleine stop in the garden; instinctively he felt that an acre would not quite hold the story that was coming and so led her slowly under the wide privet arch and far down the driveway. It was a night of velvet blackness shot with a shimmering silver half-light from a myriad crowding stars.

"I couldn't tell you sooner," murmured Madeleine, "because of the moon. It's dark to-night," she added ruefully, "but somehow I can see you and of course you can see me. I never knew stars could be nasty before."

Digby stopped and stared at her. In that moment conviction came to him of her beauty not as that of

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his child beheld with generous love but as a demonstration patent to the eyes of all the world, of men, of the trees that drooped to touch her as she passed, of the flowers that nodded primly as to a rival. She was dressed in a little frock of plaited, clinging red, cut in a shallow scallop at the neck, short-sleeved. Against its dark warmth her throat and bare arms showed white as milk on raspberries. The long lashes of her eyes made her seem to peer from shadows.

"If you wish," he said, "I'll turn my head the other way while you tell me."

"Would you?" said Madeleine eagerly and then cried with sudden decision, "No! Look at me; I'm going to tell you now." Her voice dropped to a lower tone. "Daddy," she continued, "it was a very hot day, not clean hot like here but muggy, nasty, clammy hands,—*you* know."

"Of course I do," agreed Digby.

"In the morning they had dragged us out in the broiling sun for nature study and the only last thing we saw or heard was a pestering old Teacher bird that we'd studied over and over again and he kept following us around, sniggering 'Teacher, teacher, *teach-er.*' You know."

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Digby nodded with pursed lips.

"Well, in the afternoon the editors of the *School Zephyr*, silly name, came and told me they were going to print a Hot Weather Anthology and every girl in our class was to write one and I said, 'what is an anthology?' and they said, 'a collection of choice extracts from authors, please won't you write one, the prize is Nellie Blythe's silver-mounted fly-swatter.' So I said I would and I did and I won the swatter and then I got suspended and—and that's all."

"Oh, no, it isn't, Maddie," said Digby. "Come now, tell me what you wrote."

"Every word?" pleaded Madeleine.

"Every last single word."

"Oh, Daddy, are you *sure* you realize what a hot and muggy and clammy and sticky and nasty day it was; poisonously hot and muggy and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Digby, pretending to wipe sweat from his brow. "I've often come near lying, dear, on a day like that."

"Oo-o-oh, *Daddy*," exclaimed Madeleine.

Digby nodded his head gravely. "Mighty near."

"Well!" said Madeleine, "that makes it easier. Here—here goes:

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HOT WEATHER ANTHOLOGY

TURTLE SONG

Were I a turtle on a limb,
Beside some noisome pool,
And could I like a turtle swim,
I'd never go to school!
I'd sit beneath my bony dome
And listen to the rain,
And if my mother called me home
I'd crawl into a drain,
Hobnob with oysters in the shell,
Blow bubbles all day long!
The Teacher bird could go to Hell,—
I'd sing my own darned song."

Digby suddenly crumpled at the knees, sat on his heels, buried his face in his folded arms and broke down; his shoulders heaved spasmodically. "Leave me," he gasped, "please leave me."

"Father!" cried Madeleine, stooping over him; oh, Daddy, oh *please* don't, Daddy. I tell you I'm *sorry*."

She stopped speaking abruptly and straightened; the odd sounds that were clawing their way out of her father's throat were not sobs; they suddenly freed themselves and developed into a peal of laughter that rang the gong of echo a mile away.

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"You think it's funny, do you?" cried Madeleine and in the reaction from the very real strain she had been under forgot relationship completely, grasped two handfuls of her father's hair and pulled with all her might. He broke loose, arose, tore up the driveway as fast as he could run and burst upon the dumfounded group on the terrace with Madeleine following hard at his heels. She was in a towering rage and before her father could recover his breath she exploded:

"Don't you tell! Don't you *dare* tell. If you do, I'll hate every last one of you always and always and always."

Digby sobered immediately. "Look here, Mad^die," he said. "I won't tell, but listen to me. You know it's absolutely impossible for your mother or Laura or even Junior to sleep until they hear the muggy-day poem that got you fired from school. I laughed; I couldn't help it, but that doesn't mean you haven't done a naughty thing. I won't tell but you will."

"I—I won't," said Madeleine.

Digby's eyes turned to the gray of steel, they seized on Madeleine's and locked in a gaze that

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meant life or death to him. "Tell," he said quietly, "or take a whipping you'll never forget, big girl that you are."

"W-well, whu—whip me, then," sobbed Madeleine, tears pouring down her cheeks.

Mary threw herself forward on her knees and wrapped her arms around the child's waist. "Madeleine," she said, "your father will never whip you, never in this wide world; but if you don't make him laugh again now, you'll do a cruel thing to us all, you'll bring the first great unhappiness that ever came to Mountain Acre."

Madeleine stopped crying; her face broke into a slow smile and into her eyes there sprang that swift look of liquid wistfulness which struck straight at the heart. "I'd do anything in the world for my Daddy," she gasped in one long breath, straightened in her mother's arms, froze her gaze to a stony stare and once more recited the Turtle Song with a single change,—she said damn instead of darned.

The others laughed, like Digby they couldn't help it, but he strode forward, snatched up his big baby, kissed her with the trembling lips of adoration and carried her away to bed.

*"Romance? Two turtle doves
with an echo in every heart!"*

CHAPTER V

A FEW days later Ellerton arrived unannounced at Mountain Acre; he had known for over a month that the children were expected but the fact had not impressed itself on his mind. It was two years since he had seen Madeleine or Junior and over three since Laura had last come home; as a consequence he had grown accustomed to dropping in without the slightest formality on Digby, feeling sure that he would cause no inconvenience. If it were during winter Mary was usually there but she had spent the last three summers away and as the weather on this particular day was exceedingly warm it acted on Ellerton by suggestion and gave him a hazy impression that he was to find his partner a grass-widower, orphaned of his offspring and eager for company.

Such aberrations of the mind are of common occurrence; one finds one's self convinced for no valid reason that Wednesday is Sunday or that west is east on a familiar street and an awakening from any

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such deluded condition is as real as that of being dragged to consciousness out of actual slumber. Ellerton was preoccupied with thoughts of mines, business and the money market when having left his car at the stables he entered the gate to the garden at Mountain Acre and came upon a slim vision in white bending over a half-opened rose.

He stopped and stared; not for a moment did it occur to him that the apparition might be Mary caught in an effort to renew her youth and at the same time meet the weather half-way by arraying herself in a diaphanous clinging garment of somewhat less than ankle length. He knew Mary too well, every pose of her body and mind had matured through long years under his eyes and eliminated all possibility of a confusion of her identity with that of this stranger.

So still was everything around, the fixed, sharply cut shadows of the sun-bathed hedges and trees, the soft warm air, the abnormally quiet house, that it seemed to him in his trance-like mood that he had entered to a lovely scene of abandonment and come upon the incarnated spirit of beauty in the act of taking inventory. The stooping figure sensed his

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presence, straightened and turned in a single supple movement devoid of abruptness as though no event could startle its habitual calm in action.

Ellerton found himself face to face with a girl almost as tall as himself; her head was carried with that eager lilt which imbues flowers in the cool of early morning, her shoulders were slim but erect and proportioned to her body which forced attention not so much by its veiled suggestions of perfection as by the swift impression that it was the symbol of a state of mind, a visible expression of a rule of life. Her eyes as they met his were bemused with dreams but suddenly awakened to a wide-open grayness which immediately haunted his recollection and puzzled him by confusion with his recent thoughts of Digby. Thus had Dick looked at him out of those selfsame eyes many and many a time.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, snatching off his soft hat and crumpling it nervously in his hands. He was not aware how outrageously he was staring until the eyes suddenly filled with laughter; then came recognition, overwhelming, breath-taking in its implications of cosmic changes in an old world. His lips parted to the cry of Laura! but no sound

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issued. Why? He did not know; it was as though he stood outside himself, observing the contractions of his own throat, the wave of colour that flooded his bronzed cheeks, listening to the pounding of his own heart and cursing the outrageous fixity of his paralyzed gaze.

Laura, too, had started to speak, to call him Uncle Rox and make fun of him for not knowing her but the alien force which had so suddenly possessed itself of Ellerton, body and soul, is seldom limited to a single direction; it is an ambient, an aura, within whose prescribed reach men and women breathe equally an air of suspended joy and peril, an air in which message and answer are apt to fuse to a bewildering oneness that makes the quickened heart beat to the confused measure of "Guilty; Not Guilty."

As without conscious volition Laura met Ellerton's look in spirit as well as in fact, the old familiar words died on her lips and a faint flush rose to her pale cheeks. There was no giving of self in the surrender of her eyes; only a questioning wonder linked to the courage of investigation as if she accepted new worlds as incident to the scheme of any indi-

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vidual progression and entitled to an appropriate measure of understanding. But so unheralded was the experience which now held her in its puzzling grip that for a moment her sense of innate poise failed her and she felt lost upon an unstable sea. She knew instinctively that in this sole instance she could not look to Ellerton for help and it was by a deliberate exertion of the will that she finally wrenched herself back to a more normal but still faintly palpitating condition of mind and body.

Her lips, which had been parted in suspense, broke to a shy smile. "You didn't know me," she murmured.

"No," said Ellerton, still staring at her, "I didn't know you."

Laura's eyes wandered from his face; she felt vaguely that it was unfair of him not to aid her effort to regain the dry land of every-day associations. "Junior and Madeleine have gone for a ride," she said inconsequently, "but Mother is somewhere in the house. Shall we look for her?"

Ellerton sighed and at last came to himself. "Yes, let's," he said quite easily but without familiarity. "Where's your father?"

Laura glanced at him with a gleam of mischief

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in her eye. Who should know better than Ellerton where Digby would be at that hour of the day? "I think he's at the mine," she answered demurely. "It's beyond the house, you know; around the mountain."

He forced a smile to his set lips. "Yes, I remember," he said. "I think you'd better not bother your mother just now; I'll go straight through and find him."

Her eyes still smiling but with a puzzled frown wrinkling her usually placid forehead, Laura watched his erect figure pass through the wicket and along the short visible reach of the path to the mine; as it disappeared, cut from sight by the protruding buttress of the mountain, she turned slowly and went to find her mother.

"Mr. Ellerton has come," she said.

"Mr. Ellerton?" repeated Mary. "Oh, you mean your Uncle Rox." She glanced up at Laura's face and found there a faintly smiling expression new to her experience of her children. "Don't you, Laura?" she asked after a perceptible pause.

Laura fingered a book lying on the table at her hand, glanced down at it and then raised her eyes frankly to her mother's face. "I don't know whether

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"I do or not," she said. "You see, Mother, he didn't know me. He stared at me so queerly and even when it came over him who I was he didn't call me Laura, not once, or even shake hands. Isn't it funny?"

Mary did not answer; she pretended to be absorbed in her work but her brows slowly gathered in a troubled frown. Laura started to leave the room but as she reached the door her mother spoke, "Where did Rox go, dear?"

"To the mine," said Laura. "He must have come just to see Father."

Mary glanced at her, met her eyes and smiled. "Come here, dear. Keep me company and tell me all about it."

Laura sat down on a stool at her feet. "I was in the garden near the gate and felt somebody behind me. I looked around and there he stood staring and snatching off his hat and saying 'I—I beg your pardon,' just like that."

"Didn't he smile or look surprised?"

"No, he just stared and got red. He looked like a nice boy the first time he speaks to you."

"And then what happened?"

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"Well, for just a moment I looked at him the way he was looking at me. I didn't mean to; something made me, and after that I don't know just why but I just couldn't call him Uncle Rox and he didn't call me Laura. I said, 'You didn't know me,' and he said no he didn't in a queer tone as though he felt we ought to be introduced."

The frown had gone from Mrs. Digby's face; she smiled and murmured, "Poor old Rox."

"It's odd," mused Laura aloud, "but he didn't look a bit old to-day, Mother; he was just like a boy after he's slipped on a dancing-floor and,—somehow I didn't laugh at him until it was too late."

"Nevertheless, he's twice as old as you, my dear," said Mary practically, "old enough to be your father."

"That would make him thirty-eight," said Laura pensively.

Ellerton did not return to the house until Digby was free to come with him; he greeted Madeleine with a kiss and Junior with a hearty slap on the back, but after the first laughing flush of welcome was past he subsided into a strangely detached mood which lasted through dinner, well into the evening

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and at length attracted Digby's attention and made him remark, "What's the matter, Rox? You're as solemn as an owl. What's worrying you?"

"Me? Nothing," replied Ellerton, straining his ears to catch the words of a song which Laura was just finishing. He left his seat, walked up and down the terrace, stopped before one of the open French windows to the living-room and finally slipped through it. Laura was seated at the piano, looking down absent-mindedly at her slim pale hands which lingered on the notes she had last touched.

"What is the name of that song?" asked Ellerton, forcing into his voice a naturalness he did not feel.

She was not startled; she let her fingers slip from the keys and turned to him with a welcoming smile. "It's an Irish love song called *Happy Land*," she said. "Would you like me to sing it again?"

"Please," he begged.

Bending over the piano she struck a single chord, then threw back her head and sang. Her voice lacked the power which fills the farthest limits of an auditorium, but it had a searching quality that infallibly reached the heart. Within the confines of

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the sitting-room it was clear, warm and full in its intonations, all-possessive. Ellerton listened to the words of the song with an intensity which left them printed for all time on his memory.

“I do not fear for thee, asthore,
Who hold my heart and hand;
I can not pledge thee gold galore,
Nor more than Happy Land.

“Thou hast a kingdom in my breast
Knows never bourn nor bound;
Fly high, fly low, yet come to rest,
My love's the world around.

“So much I pledge nor any more,
Here's all my loyal stand,
I do not fear for thee, asthore,
Who hold my heart and hand.”

She finished and turned with a light question on her lips, but did not ask it; Ellerton seemed quite unconscious of her, absorbed in thoughts so deep and so withdrawn that they left his eyes staring, his face a blank. She wondered if he had been listening but took no petty offense; because it was her nature to comfort and to soothe she stayed at the piano and played one wordless melody after

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another until she heard him get up and slip quietly away.

Ellerton was still virilely young; his body demanded seven hours' sleep and three square meals a day and it was his practise to see that it got them. On this night, however, he broke all rules, paced his room until every one else had gone to bed and then quietly opened the French window leading to the garden and stepped out. The night was still, as had been the day, but much cooler; there was a lift in the air that cleared the mind, charged the blood and set feet a-longing for distant places. He walked rapidly and far but when toward dawn he found himself back at Mountain Acre he was still loathe to go in and paced up and down the driveway, hands clasped behind his back, head hung low in thought.

At last he came to some decision which seemed to clear the decks for action; erect he walked straight to his room and to bed; in ten minutes he was sound asleep. On the following day he was nervous, but in quite a different manner from the night before; he laughed, chatted, entered into the family circle as of old but always with a reservation like one who awaits his hour and is doing his best to kill the intervening time agreeably. When bedtime came, he

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held back Digby and his wife by a remark casual on the surface but sufficient for his purpose.

"You two aren't going in yet, are you? It's early."

The three sat in silence for some time until Ellerton felt he was secure from interruption, then he arose and paced up and down before Richard and Mary, never going more than a couple of steps beyond them in either direction, puffing furiously at a cigarette and saying not a word. Mary's nerves were the first to give way.

"For heaven's sake, Rox," she said, "sit down."

Ellerton promptly obeyed; with elbows on wide-spread knees he ran a hand through his crisp dark hair; for a moment he stared at the tiles between his feet, then he looked up and met four curious and pitying eyes with a nervous twisted smile. "Dick," he said, "I've tackled a hard job. I—I think I'll just talk to you and—and Mary can listen."

"Thank you," said Mary meekly.

"Oh, come now, Polly," protested Digby. "You know perfectly well what Rox means; he's got something on his heart that requires man-talk and if you weren't you, he wouldn't even let you hear it."

Ellerton nodded emphatically. "That's it," he said. "You know me, Dick. You know every life

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I've ever lived, good, bad and indifferent, and if there's anything you think you don't know, why I'm ready to prove up. All that has to go by record and we needn't talk about it now. You probably remember too a lot of the things I've said about the special brand of fool that will marry a girl half his age."

Digby straightened in his chair, whistled and then laughed. "Well," he cried, "what do you know about this! Who's the happy girl, Rox?"

Ellerton stared at him with an expression of commiseration for his dullness and unbecoming mirth. "Why, who do you think?" he asked.

"Laura," murmured Mary.

A half-finished cigar dropped from Digby's fingers, suddenly unnerved; his jaw fell and he sobered immediately. "Laura!" he whispered. "Why, Laura—"

"I know everything you're going to say," interrupted Ellerton, "and some that you wouldn't dare. You think of Laura as still one of your babies, a child, in a measure still a mental dependent, but she's none of those things; God has finished making the woman of her. Don't ask me how I know it; I just

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do. Now, Dick, the things you wouldn't dare think are the things I've said to myself in days gone by about the physical limit of loyalty and that a man who marries half his age deliberately pawns his wife's honour and crucifies his own. I still believe it for the common run of women, but—"

"But Laura is of other flesh," interrupted Mary, a little bitterly.

Ellerton turned on her. "You have said it," he cried, his cheeks flushed, his eyes shining. "I don't know what you meant us to think but you've said the truth, put words to the belief that is deep in my heart and in Dick's and in yours, too. She *is* of other flesh. Don't think I'm so old-fashioned as to have come to you two for permission to court her; it isn't that. Because she is so young I'm serving warning on you so that if you don't like it, you can fight in the open as I am going to do! If I can win her, if I can only win *herself*, no consideration of friendship, or money or old ties will be too great to lay at her feet."

"Here!" cried Digby, recovering his usual sane outlook; "cut out the hysterics, Rox, and go to bed. That's what Mary and I are going to do. You've

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put a rather astonishing proposition frankly before us; now let us sleep on it. You can't add anything to what you've said except poetry and if you start in on that I'll throw you over the balustrade; which would save us all a lot of hard thinking."

He got up, laid his hands on Ellerton's shoulders and smilingly looked him straight in the eyes. "Keep your mind even, old boy. Between you and Mary and me there's something that Rox Ellerton can't break. It's just possible that she and I may decide to play what cards we have against yours, in which case we'll tell you; but as you said we both know Laura. Perhaps she'd make us feel like fools if we tried to teach her how to play her lone hand and the chances are we'll have sense enough to stay out of the game from this minute on."

Ellerton asked no more; he turned to Mrs. Digby and held out his hand. "Good night, Mary. You won't hold the madman I've been against me, will you?" he asked quietly.

"No, Rox," said Mary. "I'm with Dick, always."

Within two days he cornered her to demand what on earth it was possible and proper for a suitor to give a girl in a land where there were no English

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bookshops, no bonbons and where flowers were spread by an impartial God in a limitless carpet for the feet of the just and the unjust to tread upon. Mary laughed. "None of that, Rox," she said. "If I'm out of the game, I'm out of it. Fight your own battle, but *don't tread on my toes.*"

The courting of Laura afforded much carefully concealed amusement to the family, to herself more than to any other of its members; not until Ellerton was well on his way did it begin to dawn on his observers that he had laid his plans with all the forethought and meticulous attention to details of a Napoleon preparing a campaign for the overthrow of an empire. In the matter of gifts alone he showed a power of imagination for which Mary had never given him credit. Once it was a bit of brocade, a cope, so beautiful, so old yet intact, that it seemed in itself a worthy and lasting bloom on the fairest of all religions.

He brought it out and draped it over a chair. "How do your toes feel about this?" he asked Mary. "Picked it up in the Thieves' Market for a song."

Again it was a pair of bronze candle-sticks of unusual design or a bit of genuine Puebla ware or a

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painted fan frail as the wings of a moth but yet outlasting by generations the woman who first cast a murdering glance or blew a kiss from its shelter. To this series, stretched over a period of months, he added a tiny eagle of gold, half an inch across its outstretched wings, six feathers to each wing, six to the tail, a monstrous head, thick-beaked and crested, a hollow, squat body and beneath the tail two fixed rings in line, which showed the long wear of a cord. Laura was fascinated by the toy; she held it in the palm of her hand, turned it this way and that, discovered that the slimmest of her chains would pass through the rings and thereafter wore it as a locket. To Mary it appeared the most innocent of Ellerton's gifts until one night it drew Digby's attention as he kissed Laura good night. The two younger children had long since been returned to school and college.

"Is your little eagle wished on?" he asked.

"No, indeed," cried Laura, flushing at the smile which accompanied the question.

"Then leave it with me," begged her father. "You've never given me a chance really to look at it."

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"You may keep it for a week," said Laura, as she passed the chain over her head; but she waited.

Digby took the trinket beneath a lamp and examined it closely with his naked eye, then he reached for a reading-glass and finally went into the house to fetch a microscope. Ellerton had begun to show signs of nervousness and now thought he saw his chance.

"I think I'll go for a bit of a walk," he said and started.

"Wait a minute, Rox, please," said Mary. "There's something I wanted to ask you. I've forgotten what about, but I'll think of it again in a moment."

Before she could remember the important matter that had slipped her mind Digby came back, still wearing the monocle microscope in his eye, a sign sufficient in itself to prove to his wife how deeply he was moved out of his habitual calm.

"Rox," he said, "this thing is annealed."

"No!" cried Ellerton, trying his best to show surprise. "Let me have a look."

Mary and Laura glanced at each other with puzzled eyes, as though sharing on an equal footing thoughts of the foolishness of men.

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"What if it is annealed, Dick?" asked Mrs. Digby. "What difference does it make?"

"A difference," said Digby still engrossed, "of three hundred years, perhaps five. Look at it, my dear." He laid it in her hand. "You can hardly tell it with the naked eye but the thing isn't soldered; it's built up from a single nugget of gold, annealed into its intricate shape. It certainly dates from before the Conquest."

"Does that mean it's worth a great deal?" asked Mary.

"You can't measure a thing like that in money," said Digby. "There's ten dollars' worth of gold in it; the right collector of Aztecana would give thousands to own it."

"Something has happened to my toes," said Mary, "they feel crushed."

"Perhaps they've gone to sleep," said Laura in quick sympathy.

"Perhaps you had better, too," replied Mary. "It's getting very late. Leave the eagle behind, dear; Rox didn't know what he was giving away."

Laura sighed, slipped the trinket off her chain and handed it to Ellerton. He took it and as she looked up at him with a smile that begged his forgiveness

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for the hurt, his eyes suddenly flamed as on the day he had found her in the garden; they possessed her own, established a swirling ambient of emotion which made her feel faint yet sustained as though he and she were in suspension from the world, isolated, beyond the reach of any harm that was not in themselves. The proof that he felt that same division was in his words when he spoke as if they two were alone.

"They can't understand," he said with low intensity, "that every gift I bring you must have something of me, of what I believe to be the best, something that will show you my measure of values; frailty stealing a day from eternity, enduring beauty and the little things which are without price."

"I know," murmured Laura and, startled at the sound of her own voice, tore her eyes from his and fled. He turned and marched from the terrace into the garden, erect, buoyant, as though he were keeping step to the Song of Songs.

"Well!" exclaimed Digby, staring at Mary, "you certainly turned over the applecart."

"Who could have believed he would have had the impertinence?" asked Mary ruefully in self-defense. "I wonder where he thought we were."

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"Out of it, my dear," said Digby, rising and knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Entirely out of it."

For a time Ellerton brought no more gifts; his activity took an entirely new and puzzling direction which consisted in never coming to Mountain Acre unaccompanied. He would write or wire for permission and bring one after another of the wide circle of young men who were proud to be counted even in the outer circle of his acquaintance and would carry his generosity to the length of leaving Laura alone with each of the callow youths for hours at a time. At first she was puzzled, then bored and finally troubled; she went to her mother.

"Mother," she said, "please stop them coming."

"Who, dear? The very young men?"

Laura nodded. "I—I can't understand it; do you? Is it something we can laugh at? If it is, please tell me. *Do* you understand what he's driving at now?"

"Yes," said Mary, "I think I do. I'm beginning to see, dear, that Rox has depths I never gave him credit for; he'll be glad when I tell him we can't be bothered any more."

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To a man such an involute reply would have meant nothing, but to Laura it was quite satisfying. "Will he?" she asked and went to look for Ellerton. She drew him out into the garden and watching his face whispered, "I've asked Mother to please stop them coming; the boys. Do you mind?"

The effect of the dramatic question provided all she had hoped for in the way of entertainment; Ellerton's eyes gleamed, he blushed, his mouth opened and shut without saying anything; he was embarrassed. "Don't tease me," his pose seemed to beg without words and then he suddenly regained poise and voice. "Isn't the garden lovely?" he asked. "Every flower under the sun, almost."

The mischief died abruptly out of Laura's eyes. "There's never trailing arbutus," she said, as though the thought made the world empty.

"No," said Ellerton, "that's so. Do you love that flower? Did you know that somebody has called it the 'Hope of Heaven'?"

"No, I never knew that," said Laura softly, "but we've all felt it, haven't we? In a month girls at home will be looking for it in the bare woods. Did you ever hang a May basket?"

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"Never," said he, feeling a sudden spasm of jealousy. "Did you?"

Laura shook her head in denial and laughed; she wondered if there would ever come a time when she would not laugh at his quick betrayals of emotion so in contrast to the reserve of his measured words. It was difficult to associate the man he had been during the last few weeks with the eruption which had blazoned to all the world and his wife in the persons of Digby and Mary things from deep down in the heart, allegiance to frailty stealing a march on eternity, to beauty triumphant over soiling associations, to the worth of a trifle put out at compound interest through centuries of obliterated adventure. That outburst of sheer and desperate sincerity had laid its lasting grip on her imagination; she wondered if his eyes could possess hers as they had on that night at will or if such moments came to disturb the human breast only by favour of occasional gods. She was growing impatient of his long restraint and from the day they had spoken of arbutus turned from him more than once when his eyes begged what his tongue failed to utter.

During four weeks he abandoned Mountain Acre

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and when at last he returned, bearing with the assistance of his chauffeur a large heavy box which they placed on the tiled floor of the terrace, she was prepared to punish him for his neglect with a severe and persevering cruelty as foreign to her nature as recriminations from a flower. She ignored the box and clung to her mother's side with a pertinacity which baffled and enraged him. Digby finally put a period to the situation out of pity, but without tact.

"What have you brought, Rox? A new spring hat?"

"No," Ellerton answered shortly, cut the strong cord with which the box was bound and lifted the cover. Instantly a matchless fragrance leaped from confinement and floated out upon the air. Digby and Mary threw up their heads with a movement oddly similar, their nostrils dilated and into their eyes sprang the same look of haunting reminiscence, but puzzled, unbelieving; Laura's body went suddenly tense, then she arose, flew to the box and fell on her knees beside it. Her father and mother joined her and peered over her shoulder at a deep sod of earth half a yard square which had been lifted bodily from some damp nook in the woods of south-

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ern Jersey, still strewn with the sodden leaves of winter, twigs and shoots of budding grass but bearing on its humble bosom a first sunburst of the Hope of Heaven, a single, living, clustering, all-pervasive spray of trailing arbutus.

Laura suddenly collapsed, buried her face in her hands and sobbed her heart away. There was something pitiful in the spasmodic heaving of her slim shoulders, something so intimate, so closely allied to the unadorned sources of emotion, so redolent of the stripped privacy of the individual soul that Digby felt abashed and Mary afraid as though their feet had flippantly intruded upon a moment which should have been consecrated from them. Ellerton stepped forward, brushed them aside and sank to his knees beside Laura. They stole away swiftly, panic-stricken lest they should hear and despise themselves forever as pilferers of a sacred hour.

Laura seemed unconscious of the hands that lifted her, turned her around and brought her head to rest; all the springs of volition appeared to have dried within her; her body was lax, pliant, but warm and throbbing to the storm that racked it. Ellerton did not speak; he held her gently, his eyes wide and

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fixed, his face set, his hands trembling in a willed effort at restraint. Presently she stirred, stopped crying, raised her arms slowly until they encircled his neck, pressed her face against his shoulder and murmured, "Oh, Rox, it's too much. I—I can't stand it."

The unmeditated use of his given name, slipping from her lips so readily and in appeal, galvanized him into action as though it had been a signal tensely awaited; his set lips broke into a smile, his eyes softened and dropped to her half-hidden face, his arms tightened and tightened about her until, gasping, she cried out and struggled in self-defense, "Rox, you're hurting me."

"Then look up," he commanded.

She threw back her head and looked into his eyes, not fearfully, not merely curious of an undiscovered world, but with an abandon that conceded and demanded a mutual surrender of the utmost strongholds of the hidden heart.

"Are you mine?" he whispered.

"You know that I am," she answered.

He kissed her lips and eyes and hair with the measured ardour of one who knows that conquest

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by assault too often kills the perfect fruit of love. The months she had spent in his thoughts or at his side, while they had absorbed him to the exclusion of all but his single purpose of possession, had not blinded him to the peril of bruising that frailty which was her greatest strength, the quality of tenderness in all her thoughts and acts and ways. He arose, lifted her, led her to a big chair at the edge of the terrace and placed her there, enthroned; then he stood before her and carefully told her all the things that a woman has a right to hear from a lover's lips. The more he said, the older, wiser and more smiling grew Laura's eyes.

"There's only one thing I've wondered about," she interrupted at length, "and that's why you've been so cruelly slow about it all. Didn't you know that long-ago first time in the garden or have you been afraid?"

"I knew," replied Rox earnestly, "I knew that I could take some of you but I was afraid of those parts of you I would have to leave unwon. Laura, I want you all. You don't know how terrified I've been of marriage, not because of anything that is in

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me, but because of what I've seen. There are quite a number of people in the world who are made for the yoke and plod along quite contentedly beside whatever mate they've chanced upon, but leaving those aside I don't know a single marriage among my friends, except your father's and mother's, that isn't half-baked, soggy or threatening to crumble. One in ten of the women seized in that trap is a martyr; the rest become charnel-houses of men's ideals, for woman is the highest and the lowest of God's creatures."

He stared at Laura, wondering how far her inexperienced thought could follow him; she smiled at the trouble in his eyes and said, "Don't worry any more, dear. You've taken a long time to do it, but you've won me, all of me, Rox. Won't you believe me now, this minute, for always?"

"I will," he said, "but there's just one thing more I must tell you before I begin to make love to you for all my life and it's this. You are nineteen years younger than I am; that's a debt that is beyond payment in kind by any man, but if ever you feel that I have failed to meet the interest on it, don't be

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afraid to tell me, for I promise you by this hour that I shall cut myself away."

Laura's face paled and tears came to her eyes; she arose, laid her hands on his shoulders and looked into his face. "Rox," she said, "your mind has been touched by horrible things; I'm sorry for it, but that is all behind me and I shall never look back even through your eyes. As for cutting yourself away, I am only a girl, untaught, weak too, but never afraid; you will always be able to kill the thing in me that is you, you can never release it because it is already bound to my heart with bands that aren't of your making alone. Now come and let me sing *Happy Land* to you as I've never sung it before."

He put his trembling arms around her and held her close. "You can't," he said. "You can never sing it again as on that first time when it became my creed. Sweetheart, it's a selfish song, written by a man for men with lots of take and just a little give, but it's the cry of the heart triumphant over the transcendent fear of betrayal, a confession that in love there's no middle ground left between belief and death."

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"But it's not all selfish," whispered Laura.

"No, not all," he conceded.

"There's just a little bit, the biggest bit, that we can say together, 'Fly high, fly low, yet come to rest, my love's the world around.'"

"Father, awake! Thou art ever sleeping. Tell me, what is knowledge?"

"An inch-worm climbing the Peak of Popo."

"And storm?"

"The Peak of Popo roaring at the inch-worm."

"And man?"

"Is thy mind, then, a grasshopper? Man is that which leadeth the worm to split its sides with laughter."

"And—?"

"Enough; I would sleep."

CHAPTER VI

THE wedding of Rox and Laura took place at Mountain Acre immediately after the return of Mary from a hurried trip to fetch trousseau and the younger children. It was a representative gathering for while the Digbys had lived quiet and secluded lives they had made many true friends of like tastes in their wanderings among those to whom the City was still largely a point of passage, and Ellerton in addition to this group possessed ties of varying strength with almost every man, woman and child in the colony which made of the Capital a gay, almost kaleidoscopic, caravansary. A special train brought to the town in the valley such guests as did not come by motor; straw-bedded wagons with benches fixed to resist the steep incline and the assaults of unrestrained gaiety, drawn by six mules each, provided the final relay to the house.

To many of these people Mountain Acre was a revelation out of an empty sky; none who had not seen it could have dreamed so marvelous a conjunc-

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tion of location, intrinsic beauty and boundless outlook united to form a setting for the unique atmosphere of a home welded to and inseparable from the lives of its inmates. The effect produced was as varied as the natures of the visitors; some caught their breath and sat for a moment with closed eyes; others saw without seeing and hurried on greedy to register the last nook and cranny of the premises on the over-crowded yet eternally empty tablets of their minds; others, a few, had come to see Rox Ellerton face to face with marriage and the hidden girl who had brought the scoffer to book; still others, the vast majority, were too gay for ulterior motives. These had come to have a good time, found it awaiting them and saw all things though blurred in outline through rosy glasses.

By the immemorial right of her white veil Laura was the belle of the occasion but she was pressed hard by Madeleine who floated through laughter, dance and song like an elf cast adrift amid a throng of mortals and desperately intent on holding her own. From early morning, when she had awakened Mary to propound in all seriousness the difficulty of settling to her satisfaction the attitude she should

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assume to her impending brother-in-law until late night when she could no longer hold up her long lashes nor keep her ears open to receive her eighteenth proposal of marriage, she rode in an ecstasy the torrent of Life spelled with a big L and released with a suddenness which all but shattered her confidence in her ability to weather unaided any storm.

Who but Madeleine could have shaken her mother awake to ask her, with the immeasurable gravity of sixteen years, "Mother dear, Mother, *please*, what should I do about Uncle Rox? I've always called him Uncle Rox, but you see, after to-day things will be different, won't they? I don't want to do the wrong thing in front of all those people and if he's my brother, why—"

Or who but Madeleine could have come impulsively to the same source of all wisdom and regardless of other grown-ups declared as soberly, "Mother, Mr. Trawley has just proposed to me. I thought he was joking, but he said he *certainly* isn't; that if Rox can get away with it he guesses he can. I asked him should I speak to you and he said of course, so I guess he does really mean it, and *I* don't know what to do." Three ladies and Mrs. Digby

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answered by a single impulse and in one voice, "Refuse him, darling."

This incident could not be suppressed and so imitative of bees around a pot of unadulterated honey are mortal men before the shrine of budding beauty that after Trawley blazed the way, to be alone with Madeleine for the space of half a dance was sufficient to bring the stiffest neck in search of halter. Earnest and unsmiling, they proposed to her singly, by couples and finally in a group. She stood on a step leading from pergola to sunken lawn and stared down at their grave faces. "If you are joking," she said, with a threatening flash of her brown eyes, "I might tell you that I said damn once." With this veiled warning as to the quality of temper she kept in store, she turned in a swirl of pleated skirts and marched soberly away.

That night when Ellerton and Laura and all but the few house guests were gone, when Digby and Mary had between them carried the sleeping Madeleine into her room, undressed and rolled her into bed like some flushed log cast up by a magic sea, when the soft-footed servants had brushed away all signs of revelry and the echo of the last good night

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shouted down from the mountain road had died away, a group of men gathered on the terrace for a final Dock-and-Doris: Trawley of the Colina Mines, pink-cheeked, white-haired but with youth packed into his twinkling blue eyes; Dawton of the Power Company, dark, young, black-browed, slow in movement and in speech, sure in judgment; Temple, president of the Inter-Continental Bank, six feet of beef and bone, a plunger self-bridled under continual protest with the hard bit of caution; all old friends. Digby was there, of course, and Richard, Jr., emancipated for a night to the company of grown men.

The boy was too young, the men too absorbed in putting their thoughts into words to discern the outstanding significance of two omissions of the talk that followed. It ranged the length and width of a great country, ebbed and flowed with detractions balanced against astounding predictions, bordered a wide sweep of technical appreciations, descended to incident, rose to generalities, held in the main to a high course of satisfaction with the present, hope for the future; but it did not touch on politics and it never looked back. Success has no past, needs no

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policy; failure broods over what-might-have-beens, reminiscence marks the finished road. These men were all looking ahead, they rode a wave, and something of their exhilaration stirred the spirit of the boy who listened, stained his cheeks with red and fixed his eyes to the question, "Who would not be a builder?"

Toward the end of his holiday he spent a whole day with his father at the mine, the scene now of tremendous activity for the work of moving the entire plant to the vicinity of the new pit-head where a deep shaft was being sunk was well under way. In a few hours he seemed to himself to have learned so much which books could never teach that he approached his father in the eternal manner of boys the world over with pondered wisdom as to the advantages of leaving college at once that he might plunge the sooner into actual productive labour. He repeated verbatim whole sentences from the one talk of the giants he had been permitted to hear in order to prove his mature appreciation of the work to be done and the few there were to do it.

Digby did not answer at once; he led the way silently along the path to Mountain Acre but before

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they reached the turn and at the same spot where he had stood seven years before and dreamed of the coming of this day he stopped, sat down on a narrow shelf of rock and looked his boy over with brooding yet speculative eyes and then turned them toward the valley. "Son," he said, "sit down here by me where you can look at something bigger than a man; I want to talk to you."

Junior did as he was bidden and his father continued. "I'm glad you heard us talking that night and proud of you for remembering what was said, but there were a couple of things way down under the surface that you missed: one was the silent sigh in the heart of every man who spoke for what he failed to learn when he was young enough; the other,—but I'll tell you about that later. Your father and his friends are a hardbitten crowd, in a small way we've mixed in some very big things. Do you see that *pela'o* up by the gear-head?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's he pushing?"

Junior looked around to see if his father was serious. "A wheelbarrow, sir."

"Exactly," said Digby, "and over his head is

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swinging a half-ton-skip on the ropeway. Well, boy, the wheelbarrow was a big thing in its day, so was the ropeway, so are some of my chums to your eyes; each thing *in its day*. We pass, the instruments we use pass, too, but the principles of energy never die. What do you know about kinetics, what can you tell me of the motion of a solid of revolution, of moving axes of reference, of the stability of equilibrium? I'm not trying to frighten you, but until you can answer those questions, at least in part, you can't describe the wheel of a barrow or tell why its first revolution bridged a thousand years."

He paused for a moment, his eyes fixed back through the centuries as if in homage to the unknown who had first rounded a block of wood, burned a whole through its center and lightened for all time the burdens of beasts and men. "The hardest thing for youth to do," he finally continued, "is to escape from the immature perspective of its schoolmates. You must learn to keep an even mind if you hope to balance values. Remember the wheel, a thing so self-evident, so apparently crude that you've never before given it a thought and every time you see lever and fulcrum at work or block and tackle or a capstan, all homely familiar things,

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stop to think of the profound principles which gave them birth and made of them the highlights, the stars that shine eternally on the passing history of man, the builder."

He turned and looked into his son's eyes, wide, interested, but puzzled in their striving to fix suggested outlines so far beyond the comprehension of his immaturity. "Junior, you're young," continued his father, "you're not too old to take something from me on faith and I tell you that the men of your generation, at least in our profession, who hope to hold their heads above the waves of an angry industrial sea must have their feet set in the eternal principles of energy. The four estates of man you've read about are leveling fast; the world may have to do without genius but it can't down knowledge. Go back to college and think of it as a prep school; go to tech and imagine you're an apprentice; then come out and fight for your place in the guild that has done more than any other to bring material peace on earth. Study, boy; not because you have to but because it isn't in you to be one of the world's peons, working for nothing beyond a wage. Will you?"

Junior nodded; he could not speak, for the spirit of his father's words even though some of them

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were Greek to his understanding entered his heart and swelled it so that it clogged his throat.

"And now there's that other thing," continued Digby, turning his eyes away, "that I said you'd missed in the talk that night because it was buried out of sight. It's the pull of home on the heart, not home here around the corner, but of that wider meaning which lies under the flag of our country. I don't want you to think I'm running down the land that's given us food and shelter for so many years but in the same breath I don't want you ever to forget that I've *paid our board* and filled a hundred mouths for every meal we've taken." He paused, and then continued, "Did you ever wonder why you're a Lone Star and Madeleine a Native Son and Laura a Yankee?"

"No," said Junior, smiling.

"Because I sent your mother across the border every time. It cost a lot of money for us in those days but not the tenth part of what it's costing to keep you at school; yet I don't grudge it, not a cent of it, because the allegiance I owe to home isn't paid to a bit of bunting alone but to standards of honour, of character, of personal cleanliness, of national

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probity and strength such as can be found nowhere else at the same high level of average. Take every year at home where you were born that you can get without shirking; keep clean in mind and body; forget the leprous if you can, remember leprosy."

He got up and laid his hands on the boy's shoulders. "That's all; every word I've got to say," he added, "but, Junior, if you love your mother and me remember it all, even what you can't quite understand just now."

Junior had stood up when his father arose; their eyes met in a long look of affection but neither spoke further, Digby because he had said all that was in his heart to say, Junior because he felt the embarrassment of youth face to face with a first moment of mutual and shared intimacy with a parent. As is the way with fathers, Digby underestimated his son's capacity for understanding; he would have been amazed could he have read the boy's mind and found there only the warm thought, "I'm a man. Father wouldn't have said all that to me in front of the girls, not even before Mother. He and I are men." Side by side, their shoulders very close together as though in expression of a communion felt

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all the more deeply for not having been uttered, they returned to Mountain Acre.

Junior went back to college and finished his course with a fair rating, distressingly low in a few particulars but carried high in languages and to a veritable peak in mechanics and allied subjects. It was this specialized excellence that saw him through but neither his father nor he was sufficiently retrospective to attribute his impatient hunger for a mastery of mathematics as a tool of the mind to the moment when his boyhood's imagination had been first set in motion to match the leap of a thousand years of so apparently simple and dead a thing as the wheel of a barrow.

He came back after graduation, a handsome and extremely youthful Bachelor of Science, for two months of heavy application of his book knowledge in the rough school of the Pico mine preparatory to an effort to double up on his technical course and take his full engineering degree in two more years of study. His arrival coincided with that of Ellerton, already the proud father of two babies, breathtakingly lovely, even to the eyes of others than their progenitors and largely responsible for the fact that

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their father had become almost a stranger to Mountain Acre. Only twice in three years had he returned to the spot he had so haunted in his bachelor days and on both of these occasions his object had been to fetch Laura back a week earlier than planned and originally agreed.

For this visit, however, he came alone and without warning. From the moment of his arrival Digby perceived that his partner was worried but that the matter which troubled him was not of a personal character. In comparison with women men have few instinctive intuitions, the surest of which is the power to divine a desire unexpressed in words for a stag talk on the part of a fellow male. As a consequence Digby made none of his usual frank frontal attacks on Ellerton's absorption and waited patiently for Mary to sense the situation and carry Madeleine off early to bed, remaining away herself to attend to household duties. Ellerton glanced at Junior, not as a hint, but in speculation. The boy read the look and held his ground, remembering the day now so long ago when first he had been admitted to the councils of men.

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"Let him stay, Rox," said Digby quietly. "Now, fire away."

Ellerton nodded acquiescence. "All right," he said. "Has any one telephoned you?"

"About what?" asked Digby.

"Dick, the President left for the coast last night," stated Ellerton who had arisen and was pacing up and down the gallery, head dropped and holding a forgotten cigarette in one hand.

Digby was sitting in a characteristic pose, one elbow on the balustrade, his chair tipped back and half-turned so that his eyes could easily seek the valley. He now brought the chair down to all-fours swiftly but without noise and leaned forward. "What!" he cried, "the Old Lion show his back to that rabble? I can't believe it."

"You'll have to," said Ellerton.

The two men were silent for five minutes which seemed to Junior a century; his quick eyes moved from one to the other of their faces in puzzled questioning; for once he had heard a bare stated fact and failed utterly to understand its implications. Not in vain had he been trained in an atmosphere aloof from politics and allied to distant ideals. What did

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it matter, he wondered, who was president? Why didn't Rox and his father tend to business and talk Pico mine? He awaited impatiently an explanation that did not come. Ellerton struck a match, lit his cigarette, and said he was going to bed but walked off into the garden; Digby took out his pipe and filled it slowly, his eyes staring at the tiles between Junior's feet.

"What's the row, Dad?" asked the boy.

"Go to bed," said Digby quietly and without breaking his absorbed gaze.

Junior obeyed; he was not angry at the unqualified dismissal because long experience had bred in him a spontaneous conviction of justice in every one of his father's decisions, but he was intensely anxious as to the grounds for this particular verdict. He had one grain of satisfaction; the two men did not resume their talk after his departure. He had left his door open and heard no voices on the terrace; a peep from his curtained window showed him Rox still walking up and down alone.

Had he been able to keep awake long enough, he might have witnessed or at least surmised a momentary coming-together of Digby and Ellerton.

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"It's no use talking about it, Dick," said the latter. "We've been fanned asleep by thirty years of one-man security; now he's gone and we've got to face the music, whatever it happens to be. Probably the old tune they played for three hundred years."

Digby appeared not to have heard his words. "It had to come," he said half to himself.

"Had to come?" repeated Ellerton. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that this time it's different," replied Digby. "Peonage is a factor sooner or later controllable by force, but you can't smother the blaze from industrial slavery because it's intelligent."

"What on earth are you getting at?" demanded Ellerton.

"I'm trying to keep an even mind," said Digby, smiling at Ellerton's impetuosity. "You and I, Rox, and a lot more like us have been creating a class; it's come to life and it's going to the mat for a settlement."

"You're right," said Ellerton, his jaw setting, "we *have* created a class, fed mouths that had starved for generations and paid ready cash by the day's work. Where's the call for a settlement?"

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"Through no fault of our own," answered Digby, "it hasn't been a just wage."

"Not a just wage!" cried Ellerton, opened his mouth to say more and stopped. For a moment the two men stared at each other with a shade of fright in their eyes as though for the first time in the long course of their happy association they stood at a fork on the road of union; then by a single impulse they gripped each other's hand and parted for the night. Neither slept, for both were so entwined with the conflicting factors which threatened to throw the country of their sojourn into chaos that they felt an equal premonition of disaster without being able to put their fears in words or even define the status of their own position in relation to impending cosmic events.

They both knew by the sixth sense which they had acquired through years of contact with local and innate conditions that a great storm had broken but even in their anticipation they were too much an integral part of the disturbance to be able either at that day or later to measure or analyze it; for no man caught in a holocaust is a fit witness to its sources of origin, its course or its effect. Only from

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a bridge of intervening years and from a stand elevated by the barren virtue of non-participation is it possible to look back and down and formulate a three-sided equation which can account for all the ramifications of a national catastrophe that was to bring in its wake a decade of murder, rapine and desolation.

One point of this triangular equation was symbolized by an eagle of a man born to rule with a hand of iron and to fall with that hand's weakening; another was represented not by the resurrection but by the actual, new birth of a class of conscious artisans superimposed on generations of peonage and slavery; at the third point stood the dreamer, the cactus Messiah, a bewildered weakling subject to all the vacillations known to the human mind but from the day of his astonishing elevation sure, at least, of a crown of thorns. Eagle, artisans and dreamer all raised their eyes on high, walked toward one another blindly, collided, plunged into one and the same vortex.

Many pygmies live to malign the dead eagle who defied for thirty years the natural laws of disintegration and held in his strong talons as one grasps

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a nettle a hundred warring tribes that in the short space of three score years had known the misrule of fifty unstable heads. This soldier who quelled internecine warfare, brought order out of turmoil, bestowed peace on his peoples by the might of his right hand, enforced social integrity and won for the nation of his own welding the respect, faith and friendship of an unbelieving world; who had but four simple, every-day ambitions quartered on the shield of his character, to drain the inundated valley in which was cupped the sodden City of Palaces, to finish a trans-isthmian railway, already forty years in the building, to swing the balance of material trade to his country's favour and to establish a school in every hamlet of the land; who took boyish pride not in his achievements but in a collection of all the arms known to history; who never looked on the public treasury as an annex to his own pocket-book and whose favourite of all the possessions within his reach was an old bear-skin rug, developed one fault execrable in the eyes of gods and men,—he grew old.

Against that day a condition had been preparing from sources so distant, so covert, so widely divided

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from human prescience that its silent flood fell upon him without warning, swept him from the foundations of a lifetime of uninterrupted service, whirled him out upon uncharted waters and cast him up, a bit of flotsam on the far shore of history, an old man, childishly bewildered, broken-hearted, dead, refuse.

And yet by the laws of ethics and epochs he had no cause to complain, for unknowingly he had assisted as had Digby, Ellerton and a thousand others in more humble measure at the birth of the forces which smote him from his long seat. Blind to a slavery so ancient that it was no less natural to his eyes than the milk of his mother's breast to his lips or the high air of his native land to his lungs, he broke its shackles even while it seemed to be bowing to his unconscious will. In twenty-five years he and his helpers drew a billion dollars to their aid, never dreaming that for every coin a drop of new blood coursed through the veins of an entity bent toward independence and a destructive freedom.

The birth of an industrial consciousness through the activities of a thousand fostered foreign enterprises scattered through the length and breadth of

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the land guided the swirl of the maelstrom but tributary to this main stream were the trickles of poverty-stricken jealousy in the face of rapid wealth, of race-hatred, born of a discouraging and ever-increasing sense of dynamic inferiority, of the heavy mass of ignorance too recently allied to outright savagery to yield to the puny lever of village schools, and finally of that tragic weakness in human fate which denies the power in any mortal to rejuvenate in himself or will to another the triumphant spirit of dominance.

This last, the sapping of a vigour which had upheld the hands of honest coadjutors while it controlled the avarice of satellites imbued temporarily with vicarious integrity, was the signal for an onslaught on the once-guarded resources of the nation; the very class which through historical habit the eagle had made his agents in reform, turned parasite and first timorously, then boldly as it realized the relinquishing grip of the aging talons, resorted to blood-sucking, rule by favour and indirect speculation.

The old man knew that something was wrong with the mechanism into which he had built his

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life; he did not realize that because his times and his mission were material and because he had fixed his heart on a material resurrection for the land he loved he must perforce fall by materialism. The clouds arisen on the social horizon found him totally blind to a condition outside his scheme of ingeniously pragmatical welfare summed up in three words, railroads, industries, exports. Nobody in the world denied that these things were good and the good in them so filled his eyes that he could grasp no other. He did not understand.

Deep beneath the surface of these gathering waters moved one more disastrous cause; the flow of fifty million dollars a year which for a quarter of a century had fed the nation's sturdy industrial babe and kept it drowsily silent and content had been suddenly snatched from sucking lips by the crisis of 1907. The consequent wail of social distress was too inarticulate for immediate interpretation but not so the blow to the financial fabric of the country which, pledged at the moment to vast undertakings, swayed and all but fell.

Such was the flood prepared by destiny against the old age of a failing giant and as is the imme-

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morial habit of like inundations it spewed up a dreamer to ride its crest. Throughout the North from whence had sprung a vast majority of the successful revolutions in a country perennially in revolt was scattered a patriarchal family said to be stiffened by Anglo-Saxon and sharpened by Semetic strains of blood and which in the short space of four generations had grown to a clan numbered in thousands. The enmity of this element to the great ruler was open and gradually became traditional; as a consequence its members were cut off from the gains of favour and office and turned with a certain stalwart dignity to agrarian and commercial pursuits.

As farmers, tradesmen, ranchers, bankers, they sent roots deep into the soil, twined their fibres with the sinews of commercial life, mutely and steadily increased in strength and prosperity and formed a nucleus of wealth honestly acquired, of leisure untainted by remorse. To this peaceful faction, mentally hard by long training in the driving of a bargain but as soft as an unformed babe in physical execution, was born the dreamer.

Puny in figure, with tiny feet, thin wrists, effeminate hands, large head, bulging brow and slum-

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berous, lucent eyes, he was fashioned by nature and endowed by pecuniary independence for the life of a recluse and such was his tendency. He became a reader greedy only for that new literature which marked the birth of humanism and strove to blaze the path to a leveling of social welfare. In any other place and time he might have lived and died unnoticed behind a printed page but driven perhaps by that impulse toward human regeneration so tragically allied to Semetic tradition and lifted from natural inertia by the forces of unrest about him arrived psychologically at the point of fermentation he emerged as a pamphleteer, caught the imagination of a seething populace awaiting any plume of leadership upon which to fix its myriad eyes and found himself flung to the crest of a monster inundation not of his making.

Exhilarated, bemused and finally stunned by the phantom blow of a dream come true, he was swept by the flood into the presidential chair and there awoke to a numb terror of the overwhelming, bewildering, totally uncomprehended necessity for action. He had no strength beyond the residue of an impetus of consistency which led him to turn his

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back on the ancient formula of compromise with the mighty, death to the strong, amnesty only to the weak and harmless, and which, in the face of a gathering host of harpies, left him murmuring, reiterating, whispering at last only to himself his message of peace on earth, good will toward men.

His image lingers in the memory of the pitying public as that of a dreamer cringing from the nightmare of reality. So do we see him last, sitting crouched with his heels caught childishly on the rung of the seat of government against a great desk, his elbows on its edge, his pitifully thin wrists rising like two shafts of fragile light from cuffless sleeves, his chin cupped in slender inefficient hands, a fatuous smile upon his face and the look of the hunted in his tender bewildered eyes; a dove set to hatch the eggs of an eagle's laying.

Because his love was for the weary and heavy-laden, because he was good, because he was merciful, because he was meek, because he was long-suffering, because he was pure of heart, because he lifted unresisting the other cheek and most of all because his hand was too weak to seize the scourge and clear his temple of unworldly righteousness of those who

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would defile it, they took him out and crucified him against the back seat of a motor-car.

These events, of necessity so compactly depicted, erupting in November of 1910 and coming to an anticlimax of terror in February of 1913, rushed with such precipitancy to catch up with the premonition which Digby and Ellerton had shared that they left the two men stunned, incapable of a realization of the catastrophe which they themselves had known to be impending. Far and wide the army of newly-trained had thrown down its tools to join the deluded rabble which believed itself to have stumbled on a millennium; all work was at a standstill, the depressing silence of untold paralyzed mechanisms hung like a pall above men of action concentrated against their wills in camps of idleness. When he could safely do so Ellerton moved his family south to Mountain Acre as being withdrawn from the traveled highways of insurrection; for himself he sought not security, but companionship in the misery of waiting for the unknown.

"Father, hath man then no greatness?"

"The space of a man's years are three-score and ten and if by reason of his strength they be four score yet is their strength labour and sorrow."

"Thou mockest me."

"Nay; for in that little space of years man weldeth his single lasting link of suffering to an eternal chain."

CHAPTER VII

SHORTLY before the coming of Ellerton and his family, Digby had gone through a terrible experience of mental strain. Feeling that great events were impending, he had left Mary with Junior and Madeleine at Mountain Acre and run up to the City to order a carload of supplies. Scarcely had he reached the club where he was to put up when the *coup d'état*, since known as the Ten Days of Terror, broke over the Capital with a fury which left him gasping at the puerility of his anticipation of trouble in the face of its realization. Every highway leading from the town, almost from the moment of his entering it, became a death-trap.

In the club with Digby were several men who either lived there or had been cut off from their homes; they stared out of the windows for some time, grew bored, discovered that they were that perfect number seven and sat down to a game of poker. Within an hour it developed that the stock of beer was practically exhausted and they played a

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freeze-out to decide which of them should go out to replenish the void.

The lot fell to the smallest and weakest man present; he arose unsteadily with pale cheeks and drawn lips but did not hesitate. On a common impulse, the other six left the table, picked up their hats and followed him. He looked back with a sudden lightening of his face and asked, "You fellows aren't coming, too, are you?"

"Sure," said one with a laugh. "Why, you couldn't carry enough to water a geranium."

"That's so," said the small man. Up to that moment he had given no thought to ways and means.

The street they first crossed was in the main line of fire; Digby glanced up it and saw a dozen black blotches scattered along its length looking incongruous and abnormally still like shadows which had forgotten to follow their masters. Arrived at the door of the nearest purveyor of liquors, they had to use every stratagem to accomplish its opening. They knocked very gently, called in quiet unexcited tones, whistled gay airs and finally secured an interview with an unseen within an upper window. After much patient persuasion the merchant came down,

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opened the door, slid three cases into the street and scarcely waited to take the proffered gold.

As the men started back, Trawley leading the way and the other six following in single file, two to each case of beer, they came upon a barrel organ propped against the wall; in the deep recess of a door near by huddled its owner holding in his lap a dead monkey. The organ-grinder's eyes stared up at them from a daze which was too deep for wonder; they might have gone on and left no recollection of their passing but such was not Trawley's humour. He stopped, poked the man with his foot and asked what was his price by the hour.

The man only shook his head and glanced down at the dead monkey in his arms. There was no affection in the look, rather a dull sequence of logical deduction to the effect that what had happened to the stiffening beast might have come to its owner by an original deviation of a thousandth of an inch. He refused employment but was finally persuaded to name a price for his organ. Trawley paid it and with the twinkle in his blue eyes dancing like the facets of a diamond in the sun, slipped his gray head through the greasy shoulder strap, resumed his

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position in the van of the line, turned the crank and produced with many jerks in its tempo an air so old, so martial and so familiar that his followers, including a southerner, burst simultaneously into the cry of *Marching Through Georgia*.

More dumfounded by that chorus than by the rumble of field-guns, the bursting of shells and the crackle of Maxims, the organ-grinder got up and staggered after the cortège as though the mind which had been able to grasp the significance of a monkey falling dead from a swaying clutch on his shoulder could deduce nothing but safety in the wake of so heart-free a procession. He followed it almost to the doors of the club, stumbled on something in mid-air and fell.

Throughout their excursion Digby had watched the action of such natives of the city as were still in the streets. Their faces were panic-stricken with unreasoning fear yet set to a single determination; they were like animals stricken by the foreknowledge of an unescapable doom scurrying to their holes to die; they seemed totally incapable of regarding as shelter any refuge but the squalid cellar or the palace they knew as home.

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One woman passed swiftly holding her *rebozo* tight beneath her chin as though it could hide her from peril. From within its narrowed aperture her face gleamed white as milk; her eyes stared fixedly down the straight street as if they at least might reach the haven of her desperate desire. A bullet struck her, sending out from her flowing black cape a faint puff of dust undiscovered by many brushings. She sank to earth and the strangest thing about her was the sudden insignificance of the unbelievably small heap she became in the great emptiness of the thoroughfare.

It was half an hour after the successful return to the club that Trawley, looking from a window, discovered the fallen organ-grinder still clutching his monkey. "Dick," he said, "come here." Digby joined him; they stared at the dead man.

"It's a queer feeling," said Trawley, breaking their long silence. "I paid twenty dollars to nothing; threw it into the air. It makes you feel queer."

Digby did not answer, he was staring horrified at a *coche* which was making its leisurely way up the street. Its driver sat hunched on the box in a position natural to rainy weather but to-day there was not a cloud in the sky; in the open carriage, regard-

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less of the sun and other things, was a lady sitting very erect, her hands folded over the head of a furled parasol. Digby recognized a fellow-country-woman; she was from an outlying mining-camp and had probably come into town for a day's shopping. He rushed hatless out of the club, into the street and stopped the coach. The lady smiled and held out her hand; she was one who took pride in the whiteness and fit of her gloves.

"Are you mad?" gasped Digby. "Get out and come into the club."

She glanced at the building, waved at Trawley, and then looked back at Digby. "I can't do that," she exclaimed with a laugh. "Think what people would say! I haven't a stitch with me but what I've got on. I know perfectly well where I'm going, Dick; get back into the house; the sun isn't good for you."

She spoke to the driver and then prodded him with her parasol; he was an old man, he had seen many things. He grunted and whipped up his horses so effectively that they seemed to snatch the carriage from Digby's grasp. He stood staring after it, a half-smile on his lips, anxiety in his eyes. Presently the parasol bloomed above the lowered top

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of the carriage; it made a spot of swaying green, an impudent plume of disregard for the badly-ordered affairs of a world ignored.

He went back into the club and resumed his place at the card-table but while he met automatically the requirements of the game saying in his habitually controlled playing voice, "I raise you five," "I see you," "I'm away," "Three, please," the green parasol was bobbing before his eyes, giving them a rest by diversion from their long mental staring at what might be going on at Mountain Acre. Over and over again he had passed in review every element, every individual worker, at the Pico mine, returning invariably for comfort to thoughts of Pat Hogan and of Richard, Jr.; once in a while he tried the telephone to ascertain if central had resumed. Yet those who watched him never guessed that he was nervous.

Days and nights passed with only one noticeable break in the monotony of tumult and an almost simultaneous interruption of the poker game caused by the advent of the Embassy messenger. With almost insolent faith in the power of the flag and the white napkin flying side by side at the head of

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his motor, he had run down the opposing lines of fire to their sources and by the sheer weight of his smiling effrontery persuaded the commanding officers to suspend action for two hours to enable him to clear certain members of the colony from the district which was being shelled. He burst into the club with a list of addresses in his hand, reserved half to himself and allotted the rest to eager volunteers.

At the exact end of the two hours of the silence which had seemed abnormal when it fell on the torn city, firing recommenced but in the meantime fifty families had been hustled out and guided to welcoming homes whose location made them comparatively safe, some of them already choked with gay though uninvited guests. On Digby's last trip he came across the lady of the green parasol; he was immensely relieved and then petulantly aggrieved that he had discovered her safety so soon; it left him no anxiety but Mountain Acre.

As he hurried down the Paseo he saw two Britishers, deceived by the long quiet, on their placid way to office. There was a complacent look on their faces as though they were bathed in content at the

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mere liberty to resume familiar ways. Their brows darkened in wrath as the rattle of far-away firing suddenly shook the air; unwilling to believe their ears, they kept on doggedly for a few steps, then one of them hearing a droning as of a lazy bee looked up to meet the spent bullet that crashed into his brain. Digby stopped to help his companion carry the body to a friend's house; then resumed his way to the club.

He was amazed at his own calm; he felt sorry for the dead man whom he had known slightly but he was unconscious of any shock, nor was he stunned. It was as if he had witnessed something regrettable but quite expected. What seemed most remarkable to him was that the man had fallen away from the bullet which was against the known rules of recoil. Digby felt a certain pride in his reasoning powers when he decided that it must have been because the bullet was spent.

When he arrived before the club, he found Temple, the banker, his huge frame and bulging eyes expressing disgust and disdain, out in the street with a watering-pot pouring petroleum over three miserable bodies which had begun to pollute the air.

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He helped him set fire to the filthy rags in which they had been clothed and somehow this sensible act seemed to him infinitely more shocking than the swift death of the clean Britisher. He plunged into the poker game which was still going on with an intensity of purpose which blinded him to all but the varying value of his cards.

And so through the Ten Days of Horror. When stillness once more fell on the City it was the heavy, permeating silence of grim accomplishment. Digby secured a friend's motor-car and was of the first to dare the open highways. More than once he saw bodies heaped at street corners preparatory to being carted away or in some cases undergoing impromptu cremation; twice he caught a rushing glimpse of outposts with rifles, staring at him and then at their guns in dazed indecision as to whether he should be shot or not. At Mountain Acre he found the family quite safe and going about its usual affairs. The presence of Pat loafing with his pipe on the gallery and the dumb void created by the cessation of the accustomed faint undertone of rumbling stamps at the far-away mill were the only indications that all was not well with their world.

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It was a week later that Ellerton appeared bringing with him Laura and her babies. He was not deceived at the peace he found at Mountain Acre, neither was Digby; they remembered their conversation of two years before and its unspoken predictions and stared at each other with grave faces. They had little to say, because men face to face with catastrophe are not talkative, especially such as know each other as well as did these two.

To the women of the household every aspect was pleasing if not rose-coloured; they knew that the men were nervous, but even Mary attributed their uneasiness to enforced idleness. It seemed to her that the entire family had much to be thankful for; they had escaped unscathed, they were safe, with the sole exception of Digby they had been spared even gruesome sights. Never before had the house been so peaceful. She wondered why, puzzled over the explanation until she found it; there was no afternoon chatter from the servants' quarters, the men among their visitors were gone, the women no longer came. For some reason which she could not quite fathom the discovery turned the peacefulness a little acrid. When next she noticed Ellerton and

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her husband sitting in moody silence a tiny frown puckered her brow.

Of all the inmates of the house none was more blissfully ignorant and content than Madeleine. She had seen the first of Laura's babies soon after its arrival and without betraying her opinion had found it disappointingly ordinary; now it was two years old and quite charming, but not nearly so wonderful as its younger sister. This second child was an anomaly, a lovely sport of nature, for it had been born entrancingly beautiful, free of that look of wrinkled age which almost universally stamps upon the first days of a babe the mark of human limitation.

No group could exceed in delicate charm that which was wont to gather immediately after the baby's bath: Madeleine, round-eyed, flushed of cheek, catching her breath in little puffing gasps, holding the tiny perfumed child on her outstretched arms which trembled with a poignant, bewildering desire to hug and crush the atom of rosy joy lying upon the soft towel like a flushed pearl upon a field of snow; Mary, leaning over, her eyes filled with dimming tears, her lips curved to a smile of indescribable tenderness; Laura standing by with a look

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of questioning wonder forever unanswerable, her hand on the curly head of the two-year-old, who clung to Madeleine's skirts, begging for a peep.

As Mary looked down upon the pink perfection of those tiny naked limbs, at the bud of a mouth which smiled but never gurgled, at the eyes, so big, so blue, so content, so unfrightened, so infinitely at peace with every disposition ordained or to be ordained by a fate accepted without question from the moment of life's inception, she murmured, "I can't understand it, Laura. Baby is too perfect, she never cries, never dribbles; she isn't like a baby but like a dream come true. She fills the heart too full for belief as though she had bloomed overnight beyond the realm of pain."

And Laura breathed with dilated eyes, "It was like that; she was born like a happy sigh that hurts with pleasure."

Digby, coming upon this scene, felt a strange contraction of the heart, a sense of impotence before the sisyphistic burden of man, doomed to roll with puny arms the stone of human happiness for himself and for others against the steep ascent of an immutable fate. He turned with an unaccustomed stoop to his

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shoulders to continue his search for Ellerton, as he had news for him of grave importance.

Six months of shattering unrest had continued to shake the country since it had been rocked from its foundations by the cataclysm of the tragic Ten Days; without exception industry had been at a standstill throughout the land and hearts had grown sore under the racking of idle anxiety and hope deferred. To put an illusive period to this condition of affairs came the first of the announcements of a broadening of the advice now a year old of the home government that all its nationals should concentrate in the large cities to a policy charged with peril to the intimate sinews of ten thousand lives, the fundamental and simple things of existence, such as shelter, daily bread and the elementary garments of decency.

It was this pronouncement published in the daily press of the Capital and sent to Digby by courier that he wished to show to Ellerton whom he finally found under an arbor in the garden desperately unoccupied and disconsolately smoking a pipe in spite of a tongue gone raw from too frequent indulgence in the solace of tobacco. He raised a listless hand

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to take the paper, read the announcement through twice and sat thereafter with brows gathered in concentration.

"What do you think, Rox?" asked Digby quietly and continued himself with an impromptu resumé of the message. "You see, Washington says that while it waits, the contest of the rival forces will doubtless be a bit sharper because it's self-evident that a prompt end must come to such a situation and as a consequence increased danger to non-combatants is to be feared. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it?"

Ellerton made no reply and Digby continued. "It urges all of us to leave the country but says that doesn't mean in the least a slackening of the efforts to safeguard our lives and interests and that it should be published broadcast to every one assuming authority here in the most unequivocal way that the fortunes of those of us who can't possibly get away will be vigilantly watched over and that those responsible for our sufferings and losses will be held to a definite reckoning. It says that should be made plain beyond the possibility of a misunderstanding. What more can we ask, Rox?"

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Ellerton waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. "I've finished thinking about what it says, Dick," he answered. "I'm trying to get down to immediate facts, such as where I'll put my foot the very next step I take. I don't mind telling you I'm hard up and as for you, if you're not, you soon will be. I know all the platitudes about not thinking of money when life is at stake, but as a matter of cold fact, money is more important than life,—it always has been. If it weren't, why should a circus acrobat dive a hundred feet into a shallow tank of water for five dollars a time? How many of us do you think there are in the country to-day, Dick?"

"All told?" asked Digby.

Ellerton nodded.

"I've heard as low as twenty thousand and as high as fifty," replied Digby.

"Let's call it twenty," said Ellerton. "Think of moving day for twenty thousand men, women and children, not to the next-door flat but away from bread and butter, lots of them leaning on the arm of governmental charity just to get out. Well, I've made up my mind."

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"To what?" asked Digby eagerly. He had little faith in Ellerton's ethical capacity, but looked upon his practical acumen as virtually infallible.

"The women and children may go," replied Ellerton, "but we men must stay; we've got to stay and I'll tell you why, Dick. You can't leave bread and butter and a billion dollars of investment, equipment and running gear even in a desert without a human dam; it will seep away like water into dry sand. There's a consideration of honour on me and on a thousand more like me, the same consideration that binds a millionaire guardian or a common night-watchman. We owe it,—do you get that?—we owe it to half a million folks at home that had faith in us and I for one won't quit. I *won't*. I was born to a certain brand of honour just as surely as I was to an inalienable right to protection wherever I may choose to wander on God's green earth."

"Hold on, Rox," said Digby, smiling, "keep an even mind. You're right but you're violent. I've got to stay here; every cent of income for me stopped when the Pico mine closed down. But you talked as if it was for months, as if you hadn't even read what the paper says about unslackening vigilance."

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"I know I did," said Rox, running his hand through his crisp hair. "I can't tell you why I did, but I guess it's because I always talk by feel and not by reason."

Digby stared at him, surprised that he should have put so neatly into words what he himself had often sensed in regard to the intimate make-up of his partner but never been able to define. Together the two left the arbor to go and break to the women of the family the necessity for immediate departure from the country. Their unbelieving faces, the excitement of packing for what they considered a flying visit, the disorder consequent upon hasty choice and ruthless discarding, made on the watching men an impression which in the course of the next few years was to become a mental picture not of an event but of a condition.

The peculiar movement which now began of a vast body, an entire class of intelligent, highly-trained factors in the life of a hundred communities, was one of the strangest series of exoduses known to history; it was not a hegira carrying the implication of roots upturned and bridges burned but rather the ebb and flow of a tide anchored by the laws as old as man and as immutable as nature her-

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self on which Ellerton had laid an unerring finger. In a period of four years thousands of women and children and many men abandoned their homes thrice in distracted obedience to their country's thrice repeated command; great was the outward flood on these occasions but great also was the return flow, in some cases after months, in many after mere weeks.

Why? Why did these individuals go back? Was it to embarrass their own country by drawing petulant attention to the misdemeanors of another? No; it was because nothing short of a thunderbolt of God which should destroy them, life, lock, stock and barrel, could have made good the order to evacuate. They came back, to give no nobler reason, because San Francisco was rebuilt, because the slopes of Etna, to our knowledge continually swept by fire and brimstone since eight centuries before Christ, have to-day a thousand inhabitants to the square mile, because their friends looked askance at further loans, because the edifice of an individual life can not always be built twice, because they were desperate, threadbare, hungry and cold.

There were many who had not the resources for even a first return; citrus fruit farmers by the hun-

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dred, some of them old men, who had seen their groves wantonly razed; ranchers, whose wealth, bred through patient years, had been shot down for the hides or driven off on the hoof; small miners; prospectors; employees of big concerns whose worth hung to a narrow margin of language or location, all of them producers who had given but never sucked blood. There were those also whose funds were sufficient for but a single return; of these were the Digbys.

Almost every family has its ups and downs, its day of ease, its hour of reverse, but it will be found that the quality of fortitude with which these transitions are met is invariably in ratio to the measure of justice; the arrows of outrageous fortune sting deeply only those who know themselves wronged. Mary had gone to the States with a slim purse but a heart full of courage; she came back an old woman, aged not by years but by seeing herself and her children burdens on those who were already overladen and by the knowledge that it was through no fault of her own that she had come through years of wise management and modest opulence to penury.

Unconscious of the change in herself, she was shocked to find Digby's hair turned quite gray, a

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stoop fixed in his once erect shoulders and a mild look of shame in his steel-blue eyes as though they could never escape from the sight of himself as a failure in protection, the first duty of love. He stammered, almost choked, when he explained to her that he could not go to the port to meet her because of lack of the few dollars necessary. He looked with faint wonder at Laura and her children.

"Why did you come?" he asked.

Laura smiled, put her arms around his neck, kissed him, held up her two lovely children to be kissed and then said quietly, "To give music lessons."

She would not go to Mountain Acre; she took a tiny apartment in the City, sought patiently for the few pupils that would give her the pittance she required and telegraphed for Rox to come to her. The message missed him, for a rumour had reached him and he was already on the way. When after many inquiries he found her, he gave her the first and last angry glance of all their years together, but before he could speak she had laid her pale cool fingers on his hot lips.

"Rox," she said, "my dear big boy, we can't live any more so far away from you."

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Looking into her calm eyes he felt himself demeaned, sank to the floor, wrapped his arms around her and buried his face against her knees; his hands stole up along her body to her waist and clung there, trembling. Her fingers moved caressingly through his hair.

"When you can come," she continued, "we are here; when you're away, you'll know where we are."

"But, darling," said Ellerton, "the music lessons; they're not true, are they?"

"Rox, stand up," said Laura in a strangely potent tone that brought him to his feet in wonder. "Look at me," she continued. "I'm going to support myself and the babies if I can do it; if I can't I'll let you know. In the meantime you're going to give every cent you can make or borrow to Father. Do you know what it meant to Madeleine, or to Mother for that matter, to come back with just the clothes they went away with a year ago? No, you don't dear; you couldn't, but I do and if you refuse what I ask, you'll kill something in me that can't die alone."

Then he threw back his head and laughed, seized her, kissed her, picked her up and bearing her in the

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strong arms of love carried her protesting on a tour of inspection through every room of the little flat, the two children following, screaming with mixed fear and delight at his heels. He ended up by depositing her on the bed, piling the babies on top of her and then plunging to embrace in one monster hug all the rosy breathless mountain of beloved flesh.

Digby had begged Mary and Madeleine to stay in the City also but they had only looked at him out of offended and pitying eyes; the three went to Mountain Acre in a borrowed motor-car because the trains had stopped running. Junior rushed out to meet them; he at least was gay, no consideration of danger for himself or others could stifle his unbounded joy at this showered benefit from a Providence too long parsimonious with the least of gifts. He hugged and kissed his mother till she gasped for breath; then hugged and kissed Madeleine, pummeled her, ordered her to take down her hair so he could pull it as of yore.

"Oh, Junior!" begged Madeleine in a strangely subdued voice. She would not be his playmate but hurried to her room, pulled out all her bureau drawers, emptied them of their contents discarded months

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ago and sorted out one garment after another with an avid eagerness and pitifully tremulous lips. She had outgrown all her clothes; her beauty was as great as ever but it had an air of inevitable immodesty, of unbecoming nakedness.

Of all the force of the Pico mine, Pat Hogan alone remained. During Mary's absence he had taken on the duties of the entire staff of household retainers; with Junior for helper he was cook, laundress, gardener and stable hand. Even so he had time to loaf with his pipe on the gallery of an evening and regale his two hearers with Irish tales galore and minute-long near-oaths on the characteristics of all races not individually descended from kings. He still clung solemnly to the assertion that herself, the missus, wasn't up to being out the day but he none the less relegated to her the duty of keeping watch over the mill and zinc-room.

Time hung heavy on his hands after the return of Mary and Madeleine, who laughingly refused to let him more than wipe the dishes, but not for long. On an afternoon marked by that dreamy, infinite peace so characteristic of Mountain Acre the sounds of strange voices and clanking spurs were

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suddenly heard upon the gallery. Junior was the first to hear the noise; he hurried to the door, peeped out and then came back hastily in search of his father.

"There's a bunch of men on the terrace, Father," he said quietly but under evident restraint. "You'd better come out with me."

Digby rose to his feet with the lithe movement of a panther, apparently deliberate but in reality swift. "Richard!" he said sharply, "go to your mother and Madeleine; keep them away; stay with them; never leave them. I mean that; every word of it."

"Don't worry about me, Father," replied Junior, his face white but his eyes shining. "I'll do exactly as you say."

Digby strode out to the gallery, his head up, the stoop gone from his shoulders. A large group of men was gathered there; their horses were tethered in the garden and along the driveway. The men were a nondescript lot but they were all armed with both carbines and revolvers. Digby greeted them with an uncringing smile of good-fellowship but it met with no response from their lowering faces. They seemed to have no leader.

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"Spik Spanish?" demanded one of them.

"You know I do," replied Digby. "What do you want?"

"Fifty thousand pesos," replied the spokesman.

"Fifty thousand pesos!" cried Digby. The mere sound of that sum of money made him laugh aloud, and on the instant he was set upon, seized, and bound with a halter-rope to a pillar of the pergola. An evil-looking, low-class white whom he had once employed stepped forward, spit on him and slapped his face. "Yes," he said, with the bravado of the protected coward, "feefty tousand pesos."

Digby looked gravely from one man to another. "Some of you know me," he said. "You know that I never lie. All the money I have in the world is in my left trousers pocket."

Two or three of them approached him with the leisurely dignity that seldom deserts a member of their race, be he gentleman or bandit. They drew from his pocket a bunch of keys, a great roll of almost worthless bills and half a dozen gold coins; the bills, which were of their own high commander's issue, they threw in his face.

It was at this stage of the game that Pat Hogan,

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coming from the mine, rushed into the group on the gallery and lifted up his voice and great freckled fists in eloquent rage. "Ye blatherumskites o' half-grown stirks," he yelled, "take a sup of the length and breadth of me tongue. If you don't cut your stick out o' here, I'll strell your guts from Ballyhooly to the back of God-spel. You'll get no money here, not the last taste in life of the price your faythers paid up the lane of shame to the straddies that bore you. Spal—!"

A bullet cut the word in two, plunged into his breast; a look of childish wonder, of frightened awakening and dawning horror spread over his face as he fell toward the shot, sprawling, his great arms outspread, his knees sharply crooked. His hat rolled away, disclosing a shock of red hair damp at the forehead. He raised his glazing blue eyes to Digby's face and murmured just before the blood rushed up from his lungs to choke him, "I'm thinking long till I see my mother."

All the sadness in the world was in Digby's voice as he looked about and asked, "Why did you do that?"

"He was noisy," said one. "He talked too much."

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The white who had spit on him stepped forward, holding out the bunch of keys. "Show us the one to the zinc-room," he demanded hoarsely.

Digby obeyed. They consulted and argued in low voices, disputed, gesticulated, and excited by the flamboyant statements of the low white who never in his life had been allowed to enter the zinc-room and who consequently jumped to the conclusion that it was a treasure-house of easily lifted wealth they moved off in a body along the path to the mine. Digby waited until the last of them, gesticulating to himself, had turned the sharp corner and then called "Junior!" The boy ran out quickly, opening his knife as he came.

"That's right," said his father with a terrible calm, as Junior slashed the halter-rope. "Now get your mother and Madeleine."

"Mother can't come," said Junior.

"Can't come? Why not?" demanded Digby.

"I don't know," said the boy, his eyes filling with tears.

Digby rushed into the house and returned presently bearing Mary in his arms. Her face was twisted, her limbs powerless, but there was a look in

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her eyes as though she were trying desperately to smile. Madeleine followed, sobbing.

"Don't cry, Madeleine," commanded her father. "Get on a horse; pick a good one."

In a flash, Junior grasped his father's plan; he rushed ahead, untethered all but three of the horses, gathered their reins and tied them one to another; then he helped his father with his mother.

"Now, Madeleine," said Digby cheerfully, "be a cowboy. Drive the horses before you, but don't let them turn down the hill."

Madeleine was an excellent rider; she caught the quirt which Junior tossed to her and drove the ponies tethered to each other in a plunging mass slowly down the driveway toward the highroad. She knew too much to press them through the open gate; she let them turn unhindered down the hill, passed them quietly on the far side and then whirled at them, turned them up the road and took them past the entrance to Mountain Acre, where Junior and her father steadying Mary had just arrived, at a brisk, high-headed trot.

"Madeleine is a born cōwpuncher," murmured Digby. "I wonder where she learned that trick."

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"She knows horses," said Junior. "You told her not to let them turn down the hill."

"So I did," said Digby absently, his fingers moving tenderly on Mary's arm. "I was wrong; she knew better."

His mind was dazed with grief for Pat, faithful perhaps far beyond intention, but who had nevertheless paid the last price without a murmur; it was stunned and numb for Mary, his wife, his lover, his helpmate, flesh of his flesh. He looked wistfully at her distorted face and saw only beauty; but as he looked he awoke, came out of his perilous trance.

"Junior," he said, "steady your mother." Then he slipped back over the high cantle of the short-seated saddle to his horse's haunches and held out his hands for Mary, drew her to a firm and comfortable seat before him, wrapped his arms about her and held her securely. "Now, boy," he called, "drive this horse till we kill him; there are plenty more."

Madeleine, far ahead, turned in her saddle and looked back, startled, in answer to the suddenly clattering hoofs. In a moment she comprehended; a smile curved her lips, then they grew set and her eyes flashed as she lashed the ponies before her into

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a wild gallop. They plunged with heaving bounds up the steep ascent to Huichilac, turned the sharp corner in a rain of sparks from the cobblestones and flattened out on the mild ascent toward the town of the Three Marys into a steady, reaching run.

On the long flat beyond Parres ten miles from Mountain Acre she stopped them at a waved signal from Junior riding alone. He came up with her, said nothing, but cast her a look of loving approbation and boundless admiration, singled out the heaviest and least blown of the remounts and trotted him back to meet his father, whose horse was advancing only in a staggering walk. Mary was transferred and the whole party started on at a brisk pace, bringing her to welcome rest at the American Hospital just before nightfall.

"Come, my son, a riddle or I sleep and wake no more."

"What is it that is light and darkness, seen and not seen, heard and not heard, misunderstood yet comprehended, believed and unbelieved, loved and detested—"

"Enough. The truth writhing off the end of a man's tongue."

CHAPTER VIII

IN the period that followed Digby found himself immersed to one of the lower stratas in that dead sea of catastrophe which spread its numbing weight over a nation submerged, cutting short the vision of all those who suffered by the inundation and presenting a blank, confusing and unfathomable negation to the home government which amid many other distractions was driven by the cries of its drowning nationals to efforts praiseworthy in themselves but unfortunately directed toward perception rather than toward immediate action and relief.

In frequent attempts to understand the incomprehensible, it sent envoys of every category out upon the troubled waters. They were as men in row-boats on an open sea. Encased within their peculiar limitations like divers against exterior permeation and fed through a tube with foreign air, they plunged into the penumbra, bewildered walked with the lost on the mountainous ocean floor, asked them

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questions in a forgotten language of freedom and heard in muffled answer the unreasoning cry of the oppressed not for understanding of that which their own sealed eyes could not encompass but for plain, ordinary, every-day salvage.

To these emissaries, linked safely to an outer world, untrammelled during their cursory inspection of the distressed country by those sordid, but none the less tenacious ligaments which bind man inexorably to that place and condition where he has best learned to meet the immediate exigencies of life,—food, shelter and raiment not for future generations but for to-day, for himself and for the wife and children to be met at evening in the actual flesh,—there appeared to be no better counsel than the distracted order to do the impossible, to evacuate. These envoys withdrew, not always complacent, bemused, not quite blinded, leaving behind them shears of cheese to cut a Gordian knot of tangled sinews. The world never wearies of telling its neighbour to lift himself by his own boot-straps.

To add gall to wormwood, American and British cruisers, chafing under unequivocal orders, had stood by while three hundred American men,

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women and children barricaded against a mob were rescued by Germans from a German warship; a tale in itself which, despite many tellings, never fails to bring tears of shame and regret for the double stain on an ancient tradition.

This chronicle of cause and effect seeks a plane above individual censure; its mission is one of illumination, of illustration of the eternal truth that in the dark all men step in puddles; but it asks a judgment of the heart for Ellerton and for others who in those trying days dripped bitterness from unbridled tongues and, red-faced and angry-eyed, tried but in vain to tear down the shrine of patriotism within their breasts built by hands long dead on frontier, battle-field and ship of the line. For Digby, the merciful, no mercy is asked; he needs no defense whom time can not obliterate.

His hair gone gray, his dark brows gathered in a constant concentration of thought, his deep-set eyes filled with a troubled brooding, his tanned cheeks sunken to long sweeping lines of strength, his shoulders bowed and his thin, wiry fingers nervously busied with the cheapest of cigarettes, he was to be found near but seldom within the excited groups

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gathering in the clubs which he still frequented though he never bought nor accepted a drink. He listened to every one, but rarely interrupted any but Ellerton.

There is no broken pride like that of the man who having lived and held his own amid affluence looks around the room and knows himself the debtor of every friend present. Digby had but one possession worthy of the name, his large share in the life value of the Pico mine. That holding was temporarily worthless; it was not only unproductive but absolutely unsalable. What else he had in the world, a mere nothing, he sold; then, his mind tormented by thoughts of little things once lightly held, clothing, silver spoons, bibelots of value, portable articles of market worth, he slunk back to Mountain Acre over the trackless hills and at the hourly risk of his life.

When first his eye caught sight of the devastation of the Pico mine, wrecked by terrific overcharges of dynamite in merciless revenge, such a lump rose to his throat that he raised his hand to thrust it down lest it strangle him. Clutching his neck, he felt the hammering of his pulse in abnormally distended ar-

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teries; his head reeled and he reached gropingly for a stone upon which to sit down.

"An even mind," he murmured aloud, "God give me an even mind."

Strengthened by that appeal to the best within himself, he arose, climbed the rugged spur which cut off mine from Mountain Acre and descended the steep wooded incline to the garden at the back of the house, of which he had caught a sufficient glimpse to know that it still stood.

Eight months had passed since the afternoon of Pat's death; eight months of reading to Mary every day, of looking wistfully at her twisted face, transparent hands, wan cheeks and brilliant imprisoned eyes; eight months of watching anxiously over Madeleine, of trying to arouse her from a stupour of arrested youth, of taking her to and from a business college where she might learn to earn and fend for that self which had once been so exuberantly secure of the cream and the froth of life; eight months of accepting help from Ellerton and, latterly even Richard, Jr., proud to be a clerk at twenty-five dollars a week.

In that short eternity the privet hedge had sent

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out long, tender shoots streaking across the sky as though in frightened disarray; rust had gathered on the rose-leaves, crumpling them up in burned, distorted shapes, the bushes were laden with sodden petals and hard, unnatural seed pods. Grass had died in the lawn and sprung up wherever it should not grow. The door to the kitchen hung ripped from its upper hinges. He crept to it stealthily, entered, looked around with a sinking of the heart at the wanton destruction of the fixtures to which he and Mary had given so much thought and care, and passed on to baths, bed-, dining- and living-rooms.

The house still stood. It was a mournful echoing shell, a wreck, a derelict, an empty tomb, awaiting the burial of all those happy memories to which it had given such prolific birth. What could not be stolen had been outraged by vandal hands; even the plaster on the walls and the parquet floors had been ruthlessly gashed with axes. Many things had been destroyed in the taking, hangings dragged from their fastenings by the impatience of greed, picture frames cut down to crash and crumble, toilet fixtures cracked and broken for the lack of the aid of a wrench. Mary's lovely piano had been torn limb

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from limb and the tough mahogany showed where it had stood the test of a fire built against the dismembered heap.

"How it must have cried out," whispered Digby.

Of other heavy pieces of furniture only parts were missing; the drawers from bureaus, tops from tables, looking-glasses from dressers. What could not be made of immediate use in hovels where life demanded few conveniences and no refinements had been broken, burnt, crushed underfoot. From a shadowed corner he rescued one single object of personal value, his favourite pipe.

In that hour of poignant, overwhelming distress, the finding of the beloved pipe assumed to Digby the proportions of a miracle of good-fortune. He picked up the companion of many a blissfully contented hour, rubbed it clean on his sleeve of the splattering of powdered plaster and examined every curl and wisp of the lovely grain. How cold the briarwood bowl seemed to his caressing touch, as though feeling itself abandoned by the kindly warmth of fire and friendship, it had gone forever dead! He smiled and still smiling passed on to the front door.

It was closed, though many a window hung

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broken and open. As if held by unseen hands it resisted his efforts to throw it wide and let light into the gloomy, musty hall. He persevered and tore it loose from the grip of a hundred tendrils of encroaching vines. So overgrown with rank vegetation had the pergola become that no burst of free daylight greeted his eyes, hungry for the simplest element of cheer. He peered out into the golden shadows of the veiling foliage and his gaze suddenly widened to a sight of horror. They had added shame to murder and hung Pat's body to a trellis beam.

Digby went sadly into the garden, found an old rusty spade with broken handle and dug a grave in a nook of infinite quiet, of stillness so secure that it seemed a denial of the past, of the memory of pattering feet and children's cries at play; then he cut down the horror that had once been Pat, wrapped it in a torn, stained window curtain and laid it away to rest. It was night before he turned, weary, hungry and sore at heart, to climb and feel his way through the mountain wilderness. His dreams of coming back laden with clothing or salable articles had been demolished, but something saved him from the de-

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pression of utter failure. He would smile, wonder why he was smiling and then remember the old pipe nestling in his pocket.

On a certain day Ellerton came into town on one of his periodical visits to his family. Digby, going his methodical rounds of the clubs, was glad to see his son-in-law, watched him with a kindly gleam in his eyes, but did not force himself to the front. This unwonted diffidence, with its terrible implication of how far he had fallen in his own esteem and consequently been lowered in that of others, did not seem to him an unnatural thing; it never occurred to him to contrast it with the quiet assumption of conscious power which had once marked his contact with all the world. He knew, however, why he was so glad to see Ellerton; it was because Trawley was gone after the murder of three of his staff; because Temple had left after risking his very life in a refusal to bow down to robbery under government arms; because Dawton, slow in movement and in speech, sure in judgment, had had the idol of his labours first confiscated and then wrecked and had turned his back on the ruin.

These men were gone and many more so that the prosperous City colony, once of ten thousand, was

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reduced to as many hundreds, a residue formed of those who like Ellerton refused with a blazing-eyed stubbornness to yield to anything short of death their right to the protection to which they were born, of those who like Digby and hundreds of others could not leave and live; and finally, of those who felt secure, laughed at danger or saw a chance to make good money at mere risk of life. Such wholesale withdrawals necessarily made wide gaps in every man's individual circle and Digby's was all the more drastically reduced as he had never been more than a transient in the Capital. So he was glad to see Ellerton and hear him talk.

Of living from hand to mouth, of descending steadily from expedient to expedient, subterfuge to subterfuge, Digby had now known over four years. During their daily passing they had crawled on laggard feet but as he looked back upon that long season of weary waiting, of aching hope heartlessly deferred, it seemed to him an instantaneous nightmare from which he might yet awake to his lost happiness and to the old comfort for those he so profoundly loved could he but hold his mind to an even keel.

It was already some time since the refugees of the

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great exodus of 1914 and of the later one of 1916, had begun to return first singly, then in groups of twos and threes and finally by families. They had been talking in the club of losses, tragic only to the individual, of the hardships of the enforced journey on swarming transports, of the trials to women accustomed to lavish wardrobes landing with filthy children against the contrast of the homeland in somnolent peace and which was inclined to stare wonderingly but uninterested at these discomfited people whose faces burned with the shame of taking charity in complacent substitution for justice.

To this informal caucus came the news of the blowing up of a train and the massacre of seventeen Americans who had been assured of local protection. Ellerton whirled on Digby, his eyes full of wrath. "Four years ago, Dick, and you thought it would be a little matter of weeks! Four years of scavenging by every element, each rottener than the other, that can arm a band of cutthroats. Do you remember it, Dick? Publish broadcast to every one assuming authority that our fortunes would be vigilantly watched, that those responsible for our sufferings and losses would be held to a definite reckon-

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ing! Oh, Lord, how long!" His eyes suddenly dropped. "Suffering!" he added, "in what kind of cash does one repay suffering?"

"Keep an even mind, Rox," said Digby, with an earnestness which showed how deeply he was moved. His hearers smiled indulgently at the phrase; for many months now he had been known as "Even-mind Digby." To any one acquainted with his history this nickname marked a transition, a complete substitution of personality; there had once been a Dick Digby, pointed out by the young and ambitious, respected by all, a man of solid attainments whose weight gave ponderance to the justice within him; now they could smile indulgently when "Even-mind" spoke.

"Give them time, Rox," he continued, his eyes and cheeks burning with suppressed ardour. "They have got a lot to think about just now. A dog doesn't stop to scratch fleas when he's baiting a bear."

"No," said Ellerton quickly, "but did you ever hear of a man too much in a hurry to crush a bed-bug?"

He took a short nervous turn and glanced at the

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men around him. "Times have changed," he said. "When I was a kid at school there were two names which used to bring a gleam to every boy's eyes; a flush to his cheek. One was Decatur and the other was Farragut. The Barbary Pirates could collect tribute and lives for a century from every power in Europe but not from a two-by-four youngster of a Republic whose conception of justice reached around the world; Farragut could go for two years without a bed of his own in order that he might the better track down the buccaneers of the Caribbean. Could you have thought that the day would come when school children would be taught that an American who lets go of the apron strings of his mother-country by that act becomes a national outcast?"

"Steady, Rox," said Digby.

"Steady!" cried Ellerton. "Be steady before the spectacle of a country of our traditions first raising to its feet and then supporting the greatest deliberately and cynically piratical combination ever put across by man, a tyranny of the few which destroys us and the work of years, merely as an incident to feeding upon its own flesh and blood? Am I lying? Who here doesn't know that four-fifths of this coun-

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try is being trampled into the mire by a machine which turns out high-sounding laws in a stillborn stream with one hand and with the other raises the black banner of murder, rapine, petty graft, robbery under arms, robbery by international trickery, hails dishonour as a new-found virtue of immaculate conception, a sort of substitute emblem for the Virgin of Guadalupe and still finds opportunity to fill with foulness the misguided hand of friendship extended by a print-blinded neighbour?"

Every eye turned on Digby, curious as to what answer his even mind would find to an accusation whose proofs were believed to be self-evident. He sat silent, shaking his head from side to side.

"When I came into town to-day," continued El-lerton, "I was walking down the Paseo and I saw a young American sitting on one of the benches, evidently out of work, hard up and half starving, but he was smiling. I stopped and I said, 'What the hell are you laughing about?' Well, what do you think he was smiling about?"

"Tell us," said some one.

"He said, 'I'm laughing because I've just found

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out that their women are of two classes: those who smell and those who smell of perfume.' ”

“Rox!” cried Digby.

“I know,” said Ellerton impatiently, “an even mind. Well, there’s something the matter with an even mind which can’t see that we, our people at home, have planted the seed and nursed an abscess of famine and oppression which when it bursts will shower on our door-step, where it rightly belongs, such a heritage as will splatter the fair name of our grandchildren and of theirs. I wonder if we’ll wake up and if we ever do, how I’d like to see the faces of our people when they draw in and smell their hand, pudgy with altruism, which has been patting on the back the masters of a national slave market who hold for hire the strangled bodies of every virtue in the calendar.

Digby clutched his hands lying on the table before him until the knuckles showed white. “I believe,” he said in a clear voice, “that all men aspire to an equal justice, that when we hear a man cry out even in the stilted phrases of altruistic laws we ought to take it for a measure of his vision. I do not admit that an ideal can be besmirched by polluted hands. On the other hand,” he continued,

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with a peculiar added resonance to his deep voice, "all pollution carries with it a demand for sanitation, a wail to the ruling powers among men for execution as a step toward immediate justice as opposed to a scholastic theorem."

"You've caught it," cried Ellerton, "even you. If our people who gave that order to twenty thousand of their own flesh and blood to tear up their roots and run had first gone on their knees before the innermost shrine we all possess, humbled themselves with sackcloth and ashes, beaten their bowed heads on the lowest step of the throne of divine justice, called upon the Almighty to guide the words of their mouths and pledged their immortal souls to give body to the spoken truth, God wouldn't seem a traitor to every man here to-day."

"Perhaps they did," interrupted Digby. "We know that George Washington did a thing like that, and Lincoln; perhaps thousands besides the ruling few did just what you say."

"No!" roared Ellerton. "No people with a palsied right hand was ever the mouthpiece of God. Do you think I haven't wondered how it happened and seen it? We bothered them, God knows we did; and some clerk in Washington must have had

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a brain-wave and said, 'I've got it; why not tell the lot of them to get out?' "

"Rox," cried Digby, "I won't take that even from you. You don't know it. I tell you, if it hadn't been for our communal faculty of saying a bit too much, drawing the long bow when a short one would do, we might not be standing where we are to-day. Take the oil interests; all they had to do was to print the clause of the constitution which stated that petroleum rights were purchasable and throw in for good measure proof that they didn't hold one square foot of ground by gift or concession. If they'd stood pat on just that, said it and said it again and not another word, there never would have been an argument. We had a tale of outrage; some of us tried to make it into one of horror. When the horror really came, we cried it to deaf ears."

He arose, picked up his hat and left the club; El-lerton followed him. As they walked up the avenue they came upon an open patio, glanced in through the great open doors of wrought iron and stopped on a common impulse. The patio was carpeted with a huge Persian rug upon which soldiers were bivouacked in lounging groups while others

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arriving rode their horses across it to the stabling beyond.

"Dick," said Ellerton, "do you remember what that rug cost?"

"I never knew," said Digby.

"Forty thousand dollars," said Ellerton. "Now let's have some fun and perhaps make a killing."

He advanced on the guard and asked, "Who is in command here?"

The guard shrugged one shoulder and spat perilously near Ellerton's foot. He drew it back quietly and whispered, "I'll give ten pesos gold for the carpet and a hundred paper to the men who'll carry it home for me to-night."

The guard's face immediately produced a look of intelligence as though a secret spring had been pressed. He went into the yard to hold a consultation and Ellerton, his pulses beating rapidly at the thought of the *coup* he was about to make, took advantage to look within. He drew back and paying no heed to the anxious shout of the guard took Digby by the elbow and urged him away. "They've hacked great squares out of one side of it for saddle-blankets," he explained.

Digby drew a deep sigh but it was Ellerton who

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first broke the heavy silence. "Dick," he said, "it's that sort of outrage that breaks your heart. This country produces not a single thing except through the gift of God or the grace of foreigners. You and I have traveled it through and through yet neither one of us has even seen a live native industry; not one. That statement is enough in itself to damn any people that calls itself civilized, but the worst of it is that because they can't produce they hate creation and its creators and take it out in brutal destruction of inanimate things; the greater the beauty the quicker the blow. Vicious children with the tearing hands of apes."

Digby felt that he had no more strength to combat Ellerton's mood and tried to change the subject. "Heard from headquarters?" he asked.

Ellerton frowned but not angrily; a half-smile drew up the corners of his mouth. His position was a peculiar one. When every one else had fled he had gone single-handed to his company's main property, recruited a handful of workers from the thousands who had been turned off and proceeded to hold the fort. He did not attempt to operate, but it was his ambition to retain unbroken possession, keep the pumps going and the water down, prevent destruc-

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tion by rust and neglect and above all justify himself in his own eyes. Four separate times he had been ordered home by his superiors but in vain; he paid no heed.

They were men who counted money in millions and whose properties were estimated by their intrinsic "lives"; it made little difference to them when a mine with thirty years of productiveness in sight did its living so long as the basic value remained inalienable. They were in no sense slave-drivers and the measure of their intelligence was the extraordinary importance they attached to keeping Ellerton alive and out of harm's way. They cabled to him, they wrote to him and finally cut off his pay.

He said nothing, continued to send in stereotyped monthly reports and also to draw checks and drafts the proceeds of which were duly accounted for, including the item of his usual salary. In desperation the company at last dishonoured his paper. That action threw him into a towering rage for it struck at the most vulnerable point in his excessive pride. Who could know but he that in a time when one faction after another and finally the *de facto* government were issuing banknotes at such a rate that one went to market with a bushel basketful of them for

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the day's purchases, a slip of paper with the signature of Ellerton on it was known and treated as gold throughout a wide countryside and even attained the distinction of a name? Such a scrap of paper was called a "Roxano"; men swore by it as by the Rock of Ages.

Filled with wrath and thoughts of what a horse-whip could do to a Boston board meeting he made his preparation for a flying trip, but before he could reach the Capital, necessarily its first stage, his blood had cooled and his brain cleared; he realized that he had been about to abandon the sole strength of his position, the mingled elements of distance and possession. By virtue of the local laws and his extraordinary isolation he was a king in his own right; he went through the formality of mortgaging a hundred million dollars' worth of property and arranged to have his checks honoured locally.

Everybody knew about this friendly duel and many were the speculations as to Ellerton's motives; one of them came near the truth. Twenty years before Mary Digby had called him a nice, lovable gambler. She should have omitted the adjectives. Ellerton had not the itch which makes a man sit up all night risking sums he can ill afford with trem-

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bling fingers but he had the iron nerve which will play a long shot while the heavens fall. He was capable of defying a tremendously powerful company and fate combined in the knowledge that should he succeed he would be a made man, his rebellion forgotten, wiped out by praise, congratulations and advancement.

But deep within him there existed another consideration which few if any defined, least of all himself. He was possessed by an all-consuming flame of independence, a heritage of freedom, a will that would not bend to oppression, a fundamental, essential belief in right and justice as rewards to the fearless and upstanding and of "No surrender!" as the very breath of life without which it could not advantage the heart to beat.

On a subsequent visit to town shortly after the United States had entered the World War, he talked to Digby of the tremendous responsibility he had shouldered. "Dick," he said, "for three months now I've been drawing my pay against orders. If I pull through, it's all right; we'll be on velvet. But if I don't, remember if you ever get on your feet that it's a debt against the Pico mine."

"For God's sake, Rox," said Digby, "drop it.

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Pull out. Go home and take Laura and the babies with you. Play safe just this once. Please!"

Ellerton's face took on a look of strange abstraction. "Dick," he said, "I'll tell you the truth; I can't. I don't know exactly why but perhaps you'll understand when I say it's something in me that's first cousin to what made you borrow the money to send Junior home the day we entered the war. Tell me about that, Dick."

Digby's eyes filled suddenly with unshed tears; he was silent for a moment and then he said, "It was this way, Rox. I was out at the hospital reading to Mary; Madeleine was there too. She's pale and thin now and her eyes are so big you look at them and forget she's a girl and see a world of suffering women. Junior came rushing in with the news; he just gulped it out in one breath, flushed cheeks and blazing eyes; then he really saw his poor mother and Madeleine and my shabby clothes. He sat down, dropped his head in his arms and burst out crying."

"Poor youngster!" murmured Ellerton. "How did you handle him?"

"You know how we've been in this country," continued Digby, "since that Tampico affair when a

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German commander pushed his way through the mob and rescued our women and children; we've gone by the heart here and not by what we've heard of what went on five thousand miles away. Well, I didn't know then that every man of us was going to follow the boy's lead and turn right face about, for everything each one of us had to give; so I felt proud of him, Rox, as proud as if an angel had sung to me, 'Unto you a Child is born.' I told him to stand up, and when he didn't I asked him if he was crying because he was afraid to go!"

A smile dawned on Digby's face that for the moment wiped all trouble from its deep lines. "I wish you could have been there," he went on. "The boy jumped up and turned on me with eyes blazing and both fists clenched; he forgot all about his mother and shouted, 'You take that back,' and I did and then he marched up and down and told us why he wanted to go, a dozen reasons, each a clincher in itself, but at the bottom of all of them was this little speech, 'Dad, I want to fight. You thought I was a baby for blubbering, but I was crying because I'm so glad, so *glad*, Dad, that there's something that Americans won't stand for. You think I'm nothing but a kid, but let me tell you that every time I've

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heard of one more of us murdered in this country, a man, a whole man way back that I never knew about, has died inside of me for shame. I want to fight any one, anywhere, to save something that was leaking out of me so fast that I couldn't look any one in the face.' ”

Ellerton blew his nose violently. “Heaven forgive me, Dick, but I want to cry, too. The indomitable spirit, the divine *flair*, the knowledge that the flesh passes while right lives are things we don't learn; they are sucked in with mother's milk. And Mary; what did she do?”

“I gave her pad and pencil; she's learned to print with her left hand. She held the pencil for so long that we thought she didn't want to use it, but when I started to take it away she clung to it. We waited a long while, Rox, then at last she wrote just five words, ‘My boy, I love you.’ ”

Digby's lips trembled and his eyes filled again with moisture. “So he flopped down on his knees,” he continued, “crumpled up with his head in her thin lap and cried as though his heart would break. If she had been well and strong she would have smiled, and if she had smiled he wouldn't have cried; not a tear. I'm glad that the boy cried.”

"My son, I am troubled for I have looked in the eyes of a miserable man and beheld a great light."

"How could so small an orb shine so far; for thy sight is old and rheumy."

"I would cuff thine ears were I not troubled by the thought of Faith."

CHAPTER IX

ELLERTON might have won out in the stiff game he was playing if it had not been for the courage that was in him, mad daring linked to an unbridled tongue. For months he had held off the bandits in his neighbourhood by a rough friendship, jeering at their threats and jocularly assuring them that he swallowed a stick of dynamite every morning, took a purge every night and was consequently prepared at all times to blow up any one who touched him. He knew these people, their love of a coarse joke, their instinctive sense of fellowship with any one who deliberately came down to the low level on which they were at home. "Ai! El Rojo!" they would cry, making a play of his given name, and smile. He was a landmark, not so much a Gringo as a local institution in which they took pride.

Upon his return from the Capital after his heart to heart talk with Digby, however, he noticed a marked change in the atmosphere. A deputation of

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men he had never before seen from the bandit camps called on him and met his laughing denials with a stony surliness coupled with such muttered insults as no man can forgive or forget. Immediately Ellerton was on the alert; the lines of his mouth hardened, his eyes gleamed wickedly, but he did his best to suppress these outward signs of inner commotion. Something had happened; something he had missed. He sparred for time and finally persuaded the blackmailers to give him three days, ostensibly to get the money demanded but in reality to enable him to tap his extensive underground system of information.

In twenty-four hours he had the truth, the whole vile story. It brought to his very door conditions which were said to exist throughout the vast portion of the Republic under the control of the established government but to which he had attached no more than cursory interest until they struck at the foundations of his individual immunity. Paradoxical as it may seem to the ignorant of facts and to the unbelieving, Ellerton was in a fix because the local bandit leader had applied to the local government commander for amnesty; he wished to sur-

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render; his men desired to return to peaceful pursuits.

In a towering rage, Ellerton rode the few miles to the government barracks and demanded an interview with the commander. He found a small man, swarthy, square-chinned, badly educated and badly bred, but whose wide-open eyes presented an almost visible presentment of a single carefully cultured and intelligent hatred of the Gringo in general, Ellerton in particular.

The significance of racial detestation as an element in the life of a nation can not be overestimated; it is almost invariably the corollary of decadence, at the same time it represents such false strength as comes to a madman in convulsions, to an inebriate in delirium tremens and to a corpse in rigour mortis. In the case of the race with which Ellerton was dealing it stands alone and unsupported as the answer to the question so often asked, Why should an executive who was placed in the seat of government by the moral force, consciously and honestly directed, of a neighbouring people never miss an opportunity to spit on the friendly hand that had aided him?

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Contrary to popular conviction, it was not because of any factor of dislike or suspicion in his personal make-up, although these naturally carried minor weight, but because he was forced to the policy, borne as irresistibly as a carefully guided canoe down a cataract. He was no soldier but a civilian, by training a farmer and rancher in a small way. During the first few months of his administration he balanced like an acrobat over a military quicksand; within a year he was the apex of a military pyramid built painstakingly as of blocks of granite.

How was the miracle performed? By shrewd manipulation of the element of race hatred supported by subornation of military commanders, nominally under him, virtually his pitiless masters, on a scale never before equaled by any keystone of a corrupt oligarchy. Frequent and overt insults to a friendly power which could at any time crush him with the parings from its finger-nails built the congenital hatred of the military factions into a single edifice; special privileges and vast sums from the enormous revenue of the wondrously productive country poured in a liquid flood into the pockets of exalted

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military officials formed the cement which welded the blocks together.

The intrinsic fallacies of this superficially successful opportunist policy were twofold: one was the impossibility of continuing to fill the rapacious maw of the military machine; the other was the fact that the very life of the ruling organization depended on an unbroken continuance of outlawry throughout the land. Prophets of disaster to a nation through any specified departure meet a thankless fate; they die before they can say "I told you so." The task of the observer taking notes is simpler, but even with this concession an ounce of illustration is worth a pound of exposition. Ellerton, face to face with a live, active exponent of the system, linked effect to cause with a tragic illumination that should give sight to the blind.

"*Commandante*," began Rox, without introduction or hypocritical hand-shaking preliminaries, "although you were sent here to pacify this neck of woods, you have refused to accept the surrender of *Jefe Miguel* and his band."

"It's a dirty lie," remarked the commander pensively, rolling a cigarette.

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"Well, if it's a lie, you're going to hear some more like it before you throw me out," replied Ellerton quickly, "and if you don't listen to me I'm going to the Capital and publish the facts if I have to buy a newspaper and be railroaded out of the country the next day. Just hear a little bit of your own history. To get command of this district which is considered a 'fat' one you offered one hundred pesos monthly to a high official; he stood out for a hundred and fifty and you finally agreed. It sounds like a small sum for a man of such rank but he gets it from two hundred and thirty-eight other men of your rating and ilk; a tidy income for any one in a half-starved country."

The *commandante* smiled.

"On the other hand," continued Ellerton, "a hundred and fifty pesos a month tribute from a petty officer whose pay is just that, sounds like a lot of money. How can you do it? Because you have sixty troopers in the flesh with you and a hundred and twenty on your pay-roll. Add to that your billeting and forage perquisites in a rich bit of country and we begin to see daylight. All that's none of my business but when you refuse to accept

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the automatic pacification of this district and tell Miguel he's got to bleed me or you'll have him murdered and see that he's replaced by a *cabecilla* who knows his business, why that's a horse of another colour, damn you."

"It's a lie," commented the commander calmly.

"Well, if it's a lie," replied Ellerton, "I'll know it inside of forty-eight hours. If Miguel's cut-throats show up I'll know it's a lie, but God help you if they do. I've written a letter to my people in the City, telling the whole dirty tale and you'll get what's coming to you in the long run, you sucking bed-bug."

The commander rose to his feet livid with rage and shouted for an orderly. As the door swung open, Ellerton spoke his smiling thanks for the attention, stepped out, leaped to his horse and was off, very much satisfied with what he considered had been a highly diplomatic and clever interview. At the exact termination of the three days of grace, Ellerton's bluff was called. Armed horsemen appeared at the mine headquarters as though they had sprung from the ground. They came from every direction in groups of three and four, so that there

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was no way of telling when the last of them would arrive.

Ellerton, however, was too old a hand to attempt resistance or even arm himself. He came striding out hatless into the sun-baked court before the small house he was occupying. He wore no coat and his soft shirt was open at the collar, exposing the tense tendons of his neck and the strong but agitated beat of his pulse; his sleeves were rolled up. In his set face there was none of his old-time jeering; his lips were drawn to a white line, his black eyes flashed, his crisp hair swept back from his brow in a beligerent crest.

"Well?" he demanded, his eyes sweeping the dense group of men before him and hesitating for one vindictive instant as they recognized in the background and no longer in uniform the orderly who had been called to show him from the *commandante's* office two days before, "what do you want?"

"Ten thousand *dollares*," said the spokesman apparently self-appointed.

"Go to hell," said Ellerton, and turned to enter the house as though the interview were over. For the first time in his life he had no clear plan of

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action, no policy of deportment. Deserted by the exposure of his long bluffing of a lone weak hand against all the aces of destiny, he became suddenly confused, desperate and angry. Nothing was left to him but a stubborn, suicidal defiance.

They fell upon him in a body, struck him with the barrels of cocked carbines, beat him with stones held in puny fists, overwhelmed him, crushed him to the hard earth, grated the flesh from the side of his face, kicked him in the stomach and between the legs until he succumbed and went suddenly flaccid in their hands; then they picked him up, carried him into the house and threw him into the swivel chair before his desk.

"Write," said the orderly.

"Write what?" demanded Ellerton with a last flare of resistance.

"Whatever you like," replied the orderly, grinning evilly. "Write the letter you lied about, that you said you had sent. Tell your people what has happened to you and the things you said to the *commandante!*"

"Do you mean that?" asked Ellerton, unbelieving.

"It is your privilege," replied the orderly, still

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grinning. "We will see that they get it, all of it. It will be diverting."

During half an hour, aching in every bone of his body, his head feeling as if it would burst with the successive rushes of blood which rose to it as his rage returned, Ellerton laboriously wrote the ungarnished truth. They did not hurry him; they were secure from interruption. When he had finished, one of his retainers all of whom had scattered like fowls from the shadow of a hawk, was dragged into the room to receive instructions in his presence. They were concise.

"Bring back proof within three days that you have delivered this letter to the person to whom it is addressed or you know what will happen to your mother, your wife and your sister."

The man reached out a trembling hand. "It is done," he said. "Only give me a mule or I can never make it."

He had a friend among the bandits who granted the concession; but as he was about to leave they stopped him after murmured consultation. Almost before Ellerton could surmise their purpose his arm was seized at the wrist, his hand laid forcibly

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flat on the desk and his little finger containing a signet ring was flicked off with a blow from a foul axe. The ring slipped off and rolled rattling into a corner; they picked it up, slipped it on the blackening finger and tied it there with a bit of string.

"Take this with you," said the orderly to the terrified messenger. "They will understand the letter better."

Ellerton never stared more wonderingly than he did at his mutilated hand, no longer under restraint but lying quiescent on the desk before him, merely throbbing to the spaced bursts of escaping blood. His eyes left it only to seize upon the missing finger which was being handled so nonchalantly by filthier counterparts than it had ever deigned to grasp in life. Could that miserable fast-blackening worm of flesh ever have been part of him, of his pulsing, aching, living body? Was it credible that it had ever caressed the smooth pale cheeks of Laura or tickled the ribs of his crooning fragrant babies?

"No!" he cried, threw back his head and roared with laughter.

They took him out, strapped him to a mule and led him away into the hills.

It was only a question of two days before cable,

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telegraph and telephone, between countries, cities and houses, were busy in a frantic attempt to move a great power, a Goliath among nations, toward the salvation of one of its insignificant citizens; but there are times when power is a negation, when it is nothing, less than nothing, when the strength of a people however vast is anchored as the Rock of Gibraltar, and when the actions of men are as puerile, as insignificant, as tragically ludicrous and aimless as the movement of frightened, minutely important ants busily crawling up and down a mountainside.

Officials are not so hard-hearted as the public has reason to suppose; they are subject to the same impulses of wrath, pity and impotence as the man in the street but their innermost souls are branded with a truth,—the truth that policies once established seldom bend to the impact of any one event however outrageous. The Department would act, did act at once with all the good will in the world. It sent a forceful cablegram. So far its activity had been human, touched with the quality of mercy, but with the hurried despatch of the message the flush of animation as from flesh and blood possessed of a beating heart, immediately evanesced. Why? Because from the moment of starting on its pil-

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grimage the message became one of a dozen more like it, part of an international file, of a *dossier*, of a docket held against a necessarily postponed judgment, one of a thousand claims to be justly decided in their own day, perhaps before the courts of a future generation. A single lie has sometimes plunged peoples into war but no orderly, systematic, loose-leaf file of truths ever stopped a tennis match.

Who was to blame? An executive held in the inexorable grip of a decision not originally of his inception and whose very essence was a fulfillment through the shibboleth of the healing powers of time? Or was it the clerk who docketed the memorandum to the Foreign Office, filed its reply; docketed a further memorandum, filed a reply to that and quite justifiably went out to play tennis? Neither. If censure there be, it lies at the door of a peculiar torpidity of moral consciousness which is possessed only by clean-minded peoples who are incapable of conception of an oncoming avalanche of immorality until they awake to find themselves stained with the eternal shame of murder by default.

In the meantime Ellerton's friends were busy; Digby it is true had vanished after one look at the

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letter and the gruesome talisman which accompanied it and no one knew where he had gone, but Renbow, the head of Ellerton's City office, aided by many others, was pulling every hidden wire known to local consummations. The climax of his efforts was reached in an interview with one of the well-known flock of intermediaries whom those in the know made use of to approach with backsheesh all officials from the majority of cabinet officers down to any inspector of *pulque* or collector of excise.

The intermediary listened to the whole case attentively and realizing the importance of selling only wares which he could deliver, replied at once that nothing could be done. The look of bewildered incredulity on Renbow's face moved him to pity. He explained.

"You think you are demanding a little thing, 'don't you?" he asked. "Such a favour as has often been 'arranged' for a trifling few thousand dollars. But you're not, *amigo*; you're asking for the overthrow of the government yours recognized only three days ago."

He spoke with a peculiar twitch to his lips as though they would laugh in spite of himself at the

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sardonic humour of one presumably powerful chief, helpless before the unmerciful goad of policy, hailing another presumably powerful chief, insultingly unreceptive, as "My Great and Good Friend," across a heap of the unavenged murdered bodies of his countrymen and the ruins of twenty years of industry.

"What do you mean?" cried Renbow more bewildered than ever.

"I mean," explained the intermediary, frowning, "that the executive can't go back on the minister in question and he in turn can't go back on the *commandante* who is only one of hundreds, a single mesh in a great net; but the tearing of that mesh would unravel the whole fabric of present government control. If this thing were not true and known to every apparently insignificant *commandante*, why should this one have cynically allowed that letter to come through? Power! Why, any officer in any kind of standing with the army has more power in his little toe than the President in his right hand, upheld by all the laws and a family of constitutions. *You* know that."

Renbow bowed before the unanswerable logic; for

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the first time and in spite of the original denial of an outlet, he began to realize the hopelessness of his mission.

The go-between continued musingly, "It's a funny business. Our Old Man says he hates the Gringoes because they supply the rebels, as he calls them, with arms and ammunition. That may be true of the border,—border people breathe contraband, always have and always will,—but we all know that at least ninety percent of the arms and ammunition in bandit hands is sold to them by government troops and officers. They sometimes have to take them against their will."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Renbow.

"It's the same thing I've been telling you in other words," replied the intermediary patiently, "and your case is absolutely in point. The military can't afford to pacify the country, the ministers can't afford to pacify the military and the executive can't afford to pacify the cabinet because what strength the entire fabric of this government has is based on protected rapine."

"How can you say a thing like that?" demanded

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Renbow curiously. "It's true; but how can you say it?"

The go-between's lips drew back slowly until they showed a gleam of smiling teeth. "Why shouldn't I say it?" he asked pleasantly. "We have established the age of cynicism; we can say anything in the world we like. Protected rapine; protected from abroad. Since we came into power we have murdered unpunished the subjects of half a dozen countries; your particular average is two a month. *Amigo*, you have assured us so often that you won't hit us whatever we do that you can't do it now without looking like fools before the whole world. Why shouldn't I talk?"

Renbow flushed angrily but said nothing; after a pause his informant continued, "There's something else you haven't thought of," he said, "in asking your little favour. Quite incidentally the official in question would destroy a wonderful income, damage his own pocket to the tune of many thousand dollars gold a month. How can you counter-bribe a man in such a position?"

"Many thousands a month!" murmured Renbow unbelievably.

"Oh, quite," replied the intermediary, and smiled.

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"I'll tell you what I'll do," he added, his brows gathering to a look of concentration on the matter in hand. "I'll do my best to get you a concession of immunity from the government to pay the ransom."

"You mean we need permission to pay the money when we get it?" cried Renbow.

"Certainly," said the man, once more smiling, "a permit to 'trade with the enemy.' You can understand that, can't you?"

Before this strange interview drew to a close, Digby was well on his way up-country. The light and cunning which are commonly associated only with madmen were in his somber eyes and seemed to clear the way for him as by some mysterious projected power. He moved not automatically but with that deliberate panther-like swiftness which had brought him to his feet in a single gesture of his whole body on the day when Junior had called him to meet the individual swarm of nation-wide locusts whose lot it was to devour Mountain Acre, quiet green spot of many memories.

Arrived at mine headquarters and after meticulous, abnormally reasoned searching, he finally unearthed a miserable frightened scullery-maid whose fear had robbed her of the power of flight and had

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led her to crawl into a rain-hole beneath the foundations of the mill. For a time she could not speak but at last became sufficiently rational to point out to him the trail by which she knew the cavalcade to have gone. Gaining confidence from their solitude and Digby's determined manner concentrated with terrifying intensity on a single purpose, she reacted to the every-day impulses of pitying womanhood and whispered to him the name of the hamlet in the hills where he would doubtless find "Don Rojo."

It was already the afternoon of the fifth day since Ellerton's capture and although possessed by no premonition of a fatal outcome, empty-handed and without sane plan for his friend's deliverance, Digby pushed on swiftly and with a directness that denied the very existence of doubt in connection with his mission. Coming upon a man riding alone, heavily armed but drowsy under the warm sun, he seized him by the leg and lifted him from the saddle, not roughly but with a deliberation that would not be denied. "I need your horse," he explained with grim calm, "I'm going to your headquarters."

The man stared at the tall lank figure, at the mad glow in the somber eyes and withheld the hand which was moving toward his holster. There was

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something so elemental in Digby at that hour, so intimately allied to primal forces such as fire, flood and pestilence that the man stood with jaw and eyes wide open, all muscles of volition neutralized. It was as though to his own stupefaction he himself, his entity, had become a thing of no account, a minutely conscious crawling sin in the suddenly illumined path of a righteousness secure above the puny acts of any mortal. He watched Digby flog the horse into a gallop. He let him go and finally smiled for he knew the pony would willingly follow his nose straight to stable.

When he came within sight of the hamlet cropping out of the gray loam of the hills like some diseased excrescence of the surrounding rocks, Digby slowed his mount to a walk, finally got off, dropped the bridle and strode silently into the very midst of a lounging group which showed no astonishment even when he spoke; his coming had been too swift, too wholly unexpected and unexplainable to cause immediate reaction.

"Where is he?" demanded Digby, his shoulders erect, his head upflung.

As with him whose horse he had commandeered, so with these; they stared at him, became abashed

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not before his helpless body but before that subtle protection from on high with which all ignorant peoples endow the mad. They looked at one another questioningly and finally one of the group slunk away, returning presently with a squat individual of leonine brows and a piercing eye which measured Digby by no superstitious standards and found in him a man.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Where have you put him?" demanded Digby with an intensity that seemed to reduce all personalities, all hatreds, to the dead level of a single human intention.

The *cabecilla* looked at him shrewdly, questioningly, yet when he asked his question aloud it was a mere formality; he had already sensed the answer. "Have you brought the money?"

"Money?" repeated Digby. His brows gathered as though the sound of that word awakened in him troubled thoughts but only of a distant depression. "What money?"

The two men stared at each other fixedly and into their silence crept a groan, "Dick, is that you?"

Digby whirled and strode through the open door

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of the nearest of the *adobe* hovels; the *cabecilla* raised his eyebrows, shrugged his squat shoulders, turned and walked away.

Ellerton was lying on his back on a miserable, filthy stretcher propped on two rough hurdles. At his side had been placed an empty whisky case upon which rested a hideous bolster-like roll of flesh. It was his arm. It seemed a thing detached from his body and from the soul that flamed in his dark eyes to welcome Digby's coming. "Dick," he murmured contentedly, "old friend."

A spasm of commiseration controlled only by a mighty effort of the will threatened to shake Digby's frame into a crumpled, sobbing, futile mass. Opening and closing his fingers in an effort to dominate his emotion, he stood for a long moment looking not at Rox but at the crumbling mud wall at the level of his eyes. He did not drop them until he too could smile. He got out his knife and with that tenderness of a strong man which exceeds the gentleness of women gradually cut away the shirt-sleeve which had formed a stricture just beneath the shoulder. As the last binding strand gave way Ellerton heaved a sigh of relief which was stifled before it

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was half spent by an agonizing stab of a new kind of pain.

"Mustn't sigh," he murmured.

Digby continued his work until he had laid arm and shoulder quite bare. He merely glanced at the truncated hand, comprehended the green evil which had settled there and gave all his attention to discovering how far the infection had spread. Very gently, very tenderly, he moved the bolster-like arm until he could touch the glands under the armpit; they were like hen's eggs. Through the pink redness of the flesh, up to the shoulder, past the shoulder, traveled and radiated the pale, white, tell-tale lines of the infected nerves. The greatest surgeon on earth were he present could not save Rox Ellerton's life.

"I see that you see, Dick," he whispered. "Spreading gangrene, mortification, tetanus soon, perhaps."

Digby did not answer; he went to the door and hailed a passing woman. "Bring me some hot water," he ordered.

She stared at him and glanced inquiringly at the lounging men in sight; none of them paid the slight-

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est attention. "*Bucno*," she muttered, turned back to her hovel and presently appeared with a shallow clay *casuela* half full of greasy hot water. Digby looked at it hopelessly, dipped his handkerchief and started to bathe the festered stump of the missing finger.

"Cut it out, old fellow," said Ellerton presently. "What's the use? Get something to sit on; I want to talk to you. That's the curse of this special brand of death; the brain lives."

Digby did as he was bidden. He found another box, placed it beside the stretcher, sat down and began to wring out his handkerchief.

"Don't do that," cried Ellerton sharply. "Throw it away. Burn it. No, don't burn it. Who knows but what it might do good yet? Leave it around somewhere; a firstborn may pick it up to wrap a cut finger."

"That's not like you, Rox," said Digby quietly, and smiling to make the reproof still milder.

"Not like me," repeated Ellerton thoughtfully. "What is 'me,' Dick? I remember Rox Ellerton, a clean upstanding fellow who played an open game, never cheated, never asked quarter, who loved sweet

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things and worked for them,—things like—like Laura—like her babies—”

His eyes stared unseeingly beyond the walls of the squalid room, seizing and holding a distant vision desperately as though he strove to take it with him on his long journey. Presently he closed them tight and as if by that action he had locked his treasure away, opened them again and looked steadily at Digby.

“Will you make a pillow of your coat for me, Dick?”

“It isn’t good for you,” murmured Digby, as he complied.

“There you go again,” said Ellerton. “Not good for me. What is ‘me’? I used to think of myself as a man, but this carrion, this polluted offal—”

“Rox!” interrupted Digby.

They sat for a long time in silence; then Ellerton spoke again but a peculiar change had come to his voice, a resonance, a power that made it seem a thing apart from his sinking body. “I saw it in the paper they showed me yesterday,” he said. “The letter. It began with that damned hypocritical phrase of traditional international benediction, ‘My

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Great and Good Friend.' Dick, you have the even mind. Tell me, was it necessary? Did they *have* to recognize? Across so many festering wounds! So many blasted ambitions for a common right to live! So many rusting ruins of properties that did good, not evil, never evil in this land flowing with milk and honey and—and—blood, forever ringing with the cry of the starving! Not an industry to-day, not one, that isn't run by a foreigner at the self-chosen peril of his own life!"

"That isn't absolutely true, Rox," said Digby pleadingly. "There's one shoe factory."

"So there is," agreed Ellerton, with a sardonic gleam in his eyes. "One—one shoe factory!"

"We don't know everything, Rox," said Digby, reservedly reverting to Ellerton's great question of necessity for recognition. "Of course, it must have seemed best. People in power have a burden we never measure. Perhaps it's because we're too close. They have the burden of the counted cost."

"The counted cost," repeated Ellerton. "Nobody ever taught me about that. Where does it come in, Dick? Somewhere in the over-head charges?" He smiled pathetically at his joke with God.

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As though brought on by that slight effort a spasm contorted his body and face in a convulsion of excruciating pain. "How does this end?" he gasped when the climax had passed.

Sweat stood out in glistening globules on Digby's forehead as though his mental agony kept pace with the bodily suffering of his friend. "When the infection reaches the spinal cord," he replied.

"Excursionists," murmured Ellerton after a long silence. "I see that our chambers of commerce are sending down big parties. A pilot train ahead and an armoured car behind; guiding them along the only safe bit of railway in a big system. I suppose you'd call those week-end trippers fellow-countrymen, wouldn't you, Dick?"

"Yes, Rox," replied Digby heavily.

"I wonder if they know," continued Ellerton, "that to do business they'll have to shake the hands of fratricides, people who devour their own. I admire in a way a hatred toward foreigners; but—These people, Dick. I wonder if the tourists know that when our country in its policy of showering coals of fire released fifty odd million pounds of wheat flour to relieve the starving here, another high official took his price for slapping on a duty. And

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they telegraphed on the open wires, using his initial, to the millers around to know if they'd stand their share!"

"Stop thinking about those things, Rox," said Digby.

"Stop thinking!" repeated Ellerton. "I wish I could laugh, old Even-mind, but I don't dare; it hurts above pain. Shake their hands. If they could only come up here and shake mine and take a rotting death back to those they love!"

"Rox!" cried Digby.

"Why not?" demanded Ellerton. "We residents abroad have been accused of being privateers, Dick, but nobody ever dreamed of saying we would condone murder, robbery and rape for the sake of a few easy dollars! We worked, God how we worked! and it was good work, well done. Perdicaris!" he murmured. "Perdicaris!"

"What's that, old man?" asked Digby, leaning forward.

"Perdicaris!" repeated Ellerton more clearly. "Have you forgotten, Dick? Perdicaris was a young Greek studying at Harvard who filled in his extra time by taking out papers as an American citizen. He went away, never paid a tax, never

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voted, but twenty years later a chap named Raisuli snatched him out of his winter residence at Tangier and carried him into the hills."

A strange light dawned in Digby's eyes, a light of puzzled awakening, as though he found himself face to face with a great fact astoundingly obliterated not by the passage of long years but by a national reversal of fundamental ideals. "I—I remember, Rox," he stammered, and felt a red flush rising to his cheeks.

"You remember!" whispered Ellerton. "Who else remembers? Will they teach it in our schools? What did our country do, Dick? How are they going to tell our children, yours and mine, that story of only fifteen years ago? We sent seventy-five thousand dollars and paid it to Raisuli at the drop of the hat; we sent not one ship but a fleet,—do you get that?—a fleet under Admiral French Ensor Chadwick. We didn't kill anybody. We didn't have to. If that was shame, if that was the 'big stick,' if that was interference in the internal affairs of a weak sister country, God give me disgrace, a club and the name of bully for my portion."

"You are wrong on the details, Rox," said Digby, "but the main facts stand."

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"Privateers!" continued Ellerton, unheeding. "What about the thousands of us, who have been driven away from bread and butter by a swarm of harpies croaking in the deserted seat of government? What about the little fellows, the ranchers, the industrials, the clerks, who went down and out for the full count and couldn't shout loud enough for their home counties to hear? Do *they* smell of oil, poor bankrupt devils? Not naturalized Greeks but native sons! Privateers! What a high-sounding name! Why call us that? Why not brand us once and for all as the discarded refuse of the new nationalism which has made the name of American an evil stench in all the western hemisphere!"

"Oh, Rox," begged Digby, "please don't. It can't last, old man, it *can't*."

"That's what we've been saying for eight years," muttered Ellerton, "eight eternal years that no added blood can ever wipe out. But, Dick, believe me, I'd rather be this vile and stinking thing, discarded, forgotten, despised and incidentally betrayed by my nation than to live another lifetime under the stain of a pacifism which in the name of peace when there is no peace has smothered millions

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into bondage, driven thousands to starvation and drowned the memory of justice, honour, mercy, in a sea of blood.

"Rox," begged Digby, "please stop thinking of these things."

"I know what you mean," said Ellerton. "You mean I haven't long now. But Dick, old friend, just remember that you've been listening to things which all of us know but which hypocrisy can't say; to the tongue of death that never lies. As for me, something passes more than this transitory body that I tried so hard to keep clean, like a sword, and which is so vile now, so far on the road to rust and putrefaction. Something else passes; something else dies. The faith of a once-great country."

"Rox!" cried Digby in the sonorous voice of a sudden great strength, "you have kept the faith. If ever man did, you have. I tell you here and now, when we two are hidden away from the world and down to bedrock, that you are like a light to a lost soul. The faith of any country dies only with the last true man."

A faint happy smile such as one sees on the faces of children after desperate illness came to Eller-

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ton's lips as though all pain and death itself had become a small price to pay for just a few words stripped of the cruel reserves of every-day contacts to a rare and stark sincerity. He lay silent for some time; then his body was seized with violent contractions that wrenched it this way and that; tendons swelled and stiffened, locking his limbs in grotesque positions; the bolster-like arm, dragged from immobility, thrashed around sluggishly like some hideous fish in shallow water; his abdomen became distended and hard as corrugated iron; only his lungs still lived.

"Oh, God," he muttered, "and you too, Dick, hear my curse on these people. Throw my body in the open. Don't bury it. Let it rot and stink so that it may feel at home in this poisoned air!"

His face cleared to a sudden illumination which divided it from all that had gone before. "There was a kingdom in my breast," he whispered. "Laura's kingdom. It's rotting away,—Rox Ellerton has rotted away—"

"My son, thou hast spoken truth; my sight is old and rheumy. Look down and tell me what thou seest."

"Oh, Father! A sight to make the gods laugh. Wisdom kicking her heels free of a man's body."

CHAPTER X

UNAIDED Digby buried Ellerton's body behind the hovel in which he died. The work completed he replaced the hoe which he had taken from a near-by *quinta* and afterward walked unhindered from the bandit stronghold. It never occurred to him to wonder whether some order had gone out from the squat, keen-eyed *cabecilla* that he was not to be molested; he never gave the matter a thought because the Digby returning from Ellerton's bedside had lost physical consciousness to a degree seldom vouchsafed to man short of the moment of death.

On his way into the hills he had been so abnormally absorbed in a single fixed purpose that for the time being he not only enjoyed but actually possessed such faculties and immunities as attend a monomaniac; now not a vestige of that estate remained yet he felt no less secure from outer influence, no less imbued with a confidence quite apart from courage or kindred positive qualities, no less

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reserved to certain definite ends. He was scarcely aware of what was happening to him; he certainly could not have defined it as the first step toward an ultimate division between mind and body, if for no other reason than that introspection was one of the faculties which had been drained from his composition.

He was on the way to becoming a mind, an entity devoid of emotions, indifferent to action as allied to a subordinated body, holding legs, arms, hands and even individual fingers to an absolute subserviency which can be attained only by completely ignoring them. To an indescribable extent he was freed from the obscuring sensations of physical pain, of hunger and thirst, heat or cold, and by the same evolution became inordinantly exposed to all such impressions as were purely mental and divorced from the objective impulses of fear, regret, hope, censure or palliation.

Such phenomena of the disembodiment of the spirit are not uncommon to men at the point of death or who face what appears to be inevitable destruction. Digby himself had known more than one such moment. As mine superintendent he had once been

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called upon to examine the wall of an abandoned airshaft for outcroppings of a newly-found vein of paying ore. The time was one of acute distrust between men and their masters but he had taken with him on that occasion a foreman in whom he had every reason to repose confidence.

At the head of the airshaft which began at the third level of the mine and dropped six hundred feet to a caved-in station there lay a large coil of manilla rope. Digby picked up its loose end, tested it, found it in excellent condition, looped and tied it into a sling and prepared to go over the edge.

"You're sure you and the two men can hold me, Mike?" he asked.

"As sure as sure," replied the foreman.

"Pay it out slow," he had instructed, "and when I holler, stop."

He had descended over a hundred feet at a crawling rate when he noticed an acceleration in the pace of the rope so even yet increasing so terrifyingly that he realized he was lost though the rope could not have broken. He shouted loud and desperately to the men above to stop and in instantaneous, almost simultaneous answer, came Mike's hoarse cry,

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"God help you!" Then he was falling and knew it, falling five hundred feet to a rock bottom. From the instant of that realization until he found himself hanging doubled across a beam which had in some far-gone day slipped into the shaft and jammed, not a second of time elapsed yet it had been a sufficient interval for him to think of so many things that their review later when he was lying in bed with two ribs and an arm broken consumed hours.

His shout had been an objective impulse but every thought that followed it had been of calculation, of clear seeing, of review; he had become disembodied before death. So vivid was his recollection of having ascribed his fall to treachery that he sent for the foreman to apologize after learning the simple explanation of the accident. The top coils of the rope had been dry but once they had been paid out the men had found themselves clutching with futile fingers a slithering, slimy substance which raced ever faster through their desperate grip.

This incident will serve as well as another to illustrate by approximation the condition of mind in which Digby returned to the City; a condition which did not partake of the element of instantaneous

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summary of years into the fraction of a second, but which in all other respects was closely allied to the calm estate of a man who has suddenly abandoned life as a door to further mysteries and casts an eye cleared of mundane obscurities back along the traveled way, his consciousness alert to all considerations save those of the flesh and the body's well-being.

It is probable that could he have returned to a possibility of happiness; to Mary, his wife, strong and companionable, to Laura unbereaved, to Junior out of danger and to Madeleine awakened from her long stupour into the elf of old, eyes flashing, cheeks aglow and feet uneasy for youth's heritage of joy, he might have come back in time to that dual entity the pain of which alone binds man to earth. But such was not his destiny; the current of misfortune upon which he was borne had gathered from too distant a source to veer on the rock of a foundered hope. His intimate division might grow wider, more absolute,—it could never heal; the flesh of him had not yet lost all power to suffer, added blows could drive it into deeper obliteration but no possible factor could make it emerge.

At the station he intercepted Renbow on the way to deliver the ransom and told his story in so matter-

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of-fact a tone and so succinctly that his listener was robbed of the chance of a spoken question even while his eyes, traveling up and down Digby's lank form but ever returning to his passionless face, puzzled silently over an elusive strangeness in one who had always seemed the most readable of men, a difference too indefinable to lend itself to catechism but which set him definitely apart from familiarity.

They returned to the City together and Renbow twice went over every phase of his interview with the go-between; once for Digby's information and then in a soliloquy of detached, explosive phrases, spoken aloud but for his own ears alone as though the impassive silence of his companion drove him to build around himself a barrier of words lest he too be swept away from the every-day touch of things and dragged into a peril he sensed but could not define, a danger of company without companionship in a realm robbed of frailty but destitute of warmth.

Strange to say upon arrival in the City, Digby's first thought was not of Laura, but of Madeleine. For months he and Madeleine had been living alone in a miserable flat sparsely furnished and situated half-way between the hospital and Laura's small

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quarters. The two restricted households had made more than one attempt to join forces but owing to the fact that the surrounding country had been unsafe during so many years, all sorts and conditions of persecuted families had crowded into the Capital and filled its accommodations to the bursting point. Rents were high; there were no vacancies.

Under these conditions, Madeleine had been living a life which in every coarse detail was a negation of the atmosphere in which she had been bred. She kept house for her father, prepared skimpy meals of what was cheapest in the local market, she swept and dusted the little apartment with repulsion at every piece of ugly furniture she touched, she went to the business school and worked doggedly at mastering the science of taking down other people's words, an employment which she detested even in anticipation.

The Digbys were not aristocrats in any sense beyond that of the habit of clean-living; they had no claims to illustrious or attenuated lineage and had none of the weaknesses nor the strength of a tradition having its roots in bygone ages and bearing with a peculiar pinch-faced stubbornness the bitter

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fruits of adversity. They were plain, average Americans, interchangeable with any one of a million well-educated families, but they had assimilated to a remarkable degree that ready and charming broadening of the little interests and views of life which comes quickly to all Anglo-Saxons who live abroad and gives them a culture far above their original station, a finish not deeply founded but most pleasing in casual contact.

By the standards of accepted fiction Madeleine should have been a ray of light shining in her universal darkness, a comfort to her father, a solace to her invalid mother and a bright visitant at Laura's home. But unfortunately the record of human nature does not show a preponderance of paragons shining through the dampening fog of benumbing poverty; the young commonly have only the stamina of youth and anything which suddenly drains that precious reservoir is apt to leave them sadly exposed to the desiccating glare of the sun that shines pitilessly only on nakedness.

Madeleine was no quitter and no cry-baby; she attended to every duty thrust upon her by fate with a conscientiousness and patience which only served to wring the heart the more when one saw her sit-

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ting by the window, tired out by the day's work only because it carried with it no elixir of hope, drooping like an unwatered flower, her eyes gone dead with monotonous despair. She was of those women who are capable of impulses of drastic nobility, who can cast all to the winds for love, give all their blood in a single transfusion, cut themselves off from fortune in one clean sweep and thereafter die, but whose natures know nothing of the steady surrender of self in little morsels nipped daily from the body through years of patient self-denial.

When misfortune overtook her people she had barely passed beyond the hoydenish age which might have laughed at worn shoes, cotton stockings, patently remade dresses, turned them into a joke and brought her out triumphant even though a little brazen from the shadow which had fallen on her spirit. Unfortunately she had been caught by disaster in that breathless year of adolescence when a girl loves clothes not with any figurative affection but with outright physical adoration, that time of prettily sinful preoccupation when soft silks held in rivalry against a softer cheek produce sensations far more acute than the kiss of a mere man.

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As Digby walked toward his abode he was not thinking of Laura because his new-found power of clear-seeing had seized upon certain incidents of his life with Madeleine which at the time of their occurrence had been too blurred emotionally to show a true perspective but which stood out now with marked significance. One such scene had puzzled him, left him vaguely troubled and in fear of a recurrence which had never come. Now he knew why it had never been repeated; because he had been blind, because love had failed in its first duty of understanding.

It had happened on a rainy evening, cold and damp in the unheated little flat. He and Madeleine were sitting in silence in the front room; they had finished very early their frugal dinner, he had helped her with the dishes and reproved her mildly for dropping the drying-cloth with a shudder of disgust into the waste-bucket as she finished wiping the last plate.

"Maddie, darling, we can't throw that away; it's the only one we've got."

"That's why," said Madeleine, in a low voice.

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"Never. I'll never touch that cloth again. How soggy! No; let the dishes dry themselves; they'll feel better."

Then he had followed her into the front room, sat down with her in silence, stared at her questioningly. Presently she arose, went to the hall door and bolted it, ran into her room and after a long interval slipped out into the half-light of the fast-dying day and startled him with the impression of a ghost at large, she came toward him so silently, so white.

Her loosened hair, brushed clean of the day's sordid contacts, hung in a dark cloud about her shoulders; out of its shadows peered her face, lovely, hungry, rubbed to spots of adorable colour; her lips were parted to little anxious breaths and in her eyes was an unforgettable look of liquid, heartrending wistfulness. She wore nothing but a sheer white *chemise de nuit* of finest nainsook, a lone Christmas present sent by post by an old schoolmate. It was maidenly modest in its full length and relieved at the high round yoke with inserted hand-made lace. The tiny sleeves coming just three inches over her shoul-

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ders were of lace too; they left her long thin arms quite bare. She wore no slippers on her naked feet.

"Madeleine!" cried her father, "you'll catch your death!"

With frightened eyes and trembling lips she ran the last few steps toward him, threw herself into his arms, climbed into his lap, curled up, locked her hands about his neck, buried her face against his breast and began to quiver to the rending shock of one long sob after another. Her body smelled of coarse unscented soap; it was not warm and yielding but rigid and cold; its tremours were not of flesh surrendered but of flesh as the hard casket of the straining soul.

Digby drew her close to his throbbing heart. "Oh, Madeleine," he said with uneven voice, "you are cold, so cold."

"It *isn't* cold!" sobbed Madeleine.

"Why, dear, you're shivering with a chill; let Daddy carry you in to bed."

"No, it isn't a chill. Never in to bed, never!"

And then the tense resistance of the virginal body to any surrender broke down utterly. Relaxed and limp she sagged against him, burrowed in against

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his heart, became fluid as the scalding tears that poured in a sudden torrent down her cheeks. Her limbs grew warm, overwhelmed him with a sensation of drowning in a tepid sea. He gasped as he clung to her, rocked her to and fro and caught his mind whirling away to that day of her babyhood when staring at Humpty Dumpty, splashed and in ruins, she had screamed, "*Not* Maddie!" and he had sworn, "No, not Madeleine! Never Madeleine, so help me God!"

Wherein had he failed? In vision. He knew it now as he looked back on that puzzling evening when he had held in his arms his baby, child of the innermost fibres of his heart grown to womanhood, through half the hours of a long night and then, still frowning in bewilderment, carried her sleeping yet whimpering to bed, drawn back the covers and laid her between the coarse damp sheets with a sudden revulsion that so cold and cheerless a nest should receive her breathing loveliness into its clammy embrace.

Given the cue of that instinctive revolt, how could he have been so blind? He saw it clearly enough now. Madeleine was being driven desperate by the

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ugliness of her most intimate surroundings, by the coarseness of her clothes, her food, her occupations, by the very clamminess he had so resented in the sheets into which he had thrust her when she had come to him in the one sweet garment of all her possession to sob out her rebellious inarticulate protest against the demeaning sordidness of barely living only to live. She had not even the solace of companionship in misery, for youth seldom counts the sufferings of its elders as of the nature of its own pain and the very few young people whom she knew had long since been swept out of the country by succeeding emigrations.

As Digby strode along he tried in vain to think of little things which he might deny himself to give her at least one pair of silk stockings, one dainty frock, one change of dish-cloths, one day in the week when she might draw a long happy breath and smile; but he more than any other of his immediate circle was living along the very bedrock of hand-to-mouth existence. He had long since abandoned even the cheapest of cigarettes; he still smoked a single pipe after each meal because Ellerton had passed on a pound of mixture which was not to his taste. But

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even so, thought Digby, he had failed in not seizing upon Madeleine's spirit and lifting it by a deliberate effort of the will toward cheerfulness. He might have woven such tales as would have caught and held her safe in a gossamer web of illusion and fancy but, alas! he had quite forgotten the Little Folk.

What was it he had made the rose-janitress say to himself? "If you don't want to lose your children and if they don't want to lose themselves, don't any of you ever forget old friends, least of all the Little Folk; if you're afraid of the dark, you'd better keep us handy for we are the light that shines on yesterday." He sighed deeply but his lips drew to no sneer, no deprecating smile at the memory of the airy fantasy with which he had striven so long ago to bridge for his own the little chasm between childhood and youth.

"I have forgotten the Little Folk," he said to himself quite gravely. "Old friends."

He hurried up the three flights of stairs to the flat and knocked on the door hoping that Madeleine would come running to let him in, but there was no answer and after waiting a minute he took

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his keys from his pocket and began to sort them. How strange they looked in the face of his abject poverty! So many keys,—keys to store-room, study, stables, desk, drawers and iron safe, keys to trunks and bags, keys whose uses he could no longer remember, so many keys yet no single thing left to keep behind a lock.

He opened the door and entered to that musty smell which habitations acquire almost immediately upon abandonment. The air was not impure, for a window was open, but it was nevertheless laden with faintly sour odours. He opened more windows and the few intervening doors, looking at the same time for indications of Madeleine's recent presence. There were none but he was not alarmed; he had had no time to let the girl know of his sudden journey but he was sure she would have heard of it. Naturally she had gone to stay with Laura.

Still filled with thoughts of the night of Madeleine's sobbing but unspoken protest against the sordidness of her surroundings and feeling even in his new rôle of a mind more than half-fledged for independent flight the compunction of a dispassionate remorse, he entered her bedroom and stared about

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him making inventory of all its unclean nakedness, of its uncovered stains of former occupations, of its cry for dainty coverings, of the ugliness of its few sticks of inappropriate furniture. One chair was more eloquent than many tongues; it had two legs and a rung painted white by an inexperienced hand. He remembered that day,—a day when Madeleine had been given a tragically insufficient sample tin of enamel paint. His eyes fell upon the bed and looked it over with whole-hearted disdain; it seemed to mark the limits between endurance with dignity and the insufferable.

His gaze traveled its little length and was finally caught by a bit of paper looking like a pale unhealthy butterfly born and bred in a sunless air impaled upon the single pillow with a pin. He reached over, snatched it up and read the few words it contained. In that moment he was again all body, subject and defenseless before the blow that called it once more into full sensibility only to drive it deeper than ever into an ultimate submergence.

“Madeleine!” he shouted in a full-throated tearing cry that left him trembling with sudden recollection of the screaming of mules caught in a mine

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fire, the most agonizing of inhuman sounds known to man.

He fell on his knees beside the virginal cot, so mean, so ineffectual, so criminally at fault in that it had failed miserably in its mission of rest and happy dreams to the sorely distressed. His arms outflung in the relaxation of utter despair, his head buried against the soggy dampness of the abhorred pillow and his broad shoulders writhing, he sobbed not as men sob for love at a woman's knees nor for grief beside the dead but as he alone weeps who measures in a little empty room beside a vacant bed the infinity between the floor of hell and the mercy seat of God.

An hour later he was once more that strange man whom Renbow had failed to recognize completely. He arose, sought out the few stale scraps there were to eat in the flat and paced up and down its limited floor-space waiting for he knew not what. He was not conscious that he was waiting. His mind had returned to its supremacy over a widened empire. He was thinking of Madeleine not as his baby, his adored above all other flesh and blood, but as woman the castaway, and of himself as partaker in her sins and penalties. His vision grew incisive

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as the touch of ice and presently he threw up his head to a clear thought definitive, rounded and complete.

"Not I alone," he said aloud. "Every man who takes profit before reparation from this accursed land can look upon his own wife, his sister, his own child and say for them and for himself, 'Inasmuch as we have not cared we too are sinners—outcast, shunned and despised.'"

Digby did not speak with rancour; never had he felt himself less in need of the self-application of his frequent admonition to Ellerton to keep an even mind. He was calm not by an effort of the will but by the draining of emotion from his heart. He saw with a dazzling clearness a nation-wide complicity by apathy in his own burden of shame.

He imagined himself a universal spectre leaning over the shoulders of all the fathers in his native land, reading papers at the breakfast table, noting another murder of a fellow-countryman, another outrage, placidly turning their thoughts back to mental accounts of cash profit and loss or gazing indulgently at wives and nurtured children; he imagined himself tapping them on the shoulders, lean-

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ing over and whispering in their ears, "You, too; your women, too. Look! The Scarlet Letter!"

Inasmuch as they had abandoned an ancient tradition which shouted full-voiced, "Thou shalt not kill," and meant it; inasmuch as they had too willingly bowed to sophistries of right and might and languidly questioned the ethics of staying the hand of murder; most of all because they were ready in flocks to step across the unburied bodies of the unavenged and snatch profit by private treaty from the still bloody hand of the assassin, he found them sharers in his guilt, their women too, responsible for the tragedy of his beloved whom their too-soft hands had pushed into the street.

He was still pacing up and down, luminous-eyed but terribly calm of feature, when Laura threw open the door of the flat, stepped in and stood before him. Her whole body was stricken, her head drooped like a golden flower on a wilting stem; she did not speak for a moment but there was panic in the agonized eyes she raised to her father's impassive face.

"It isn't true," she whispered at last. "Daddy, it isn't true! Rox, he's *not* dead; not quite dead. Not gone so that I can never see him again!"

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Digby felt a sudden weariness as though her cry were unanswerable because it was uttered in a forgotten tongue. He stared at her with an air of detached calculation. He remembered vividly the day when Rox had said of her, "*She is of other flesh,*" and neither he nor Mary had contradicted. As if against this day Laura had been born strong; all her frailty,—the illusive delicacy of her faintly tinted cheeks, of her lovely but slight shoulders, of her long pale hands,—was but her strength. She was an indomitable spirit lightly burdened with flesh. He had always felt it, always bowed to the veiled truth, but now it stood out clearly to his perception. He said nothing; only looked at her.

She turned from his revealing gaze, raised both hands to her throat in a pitiful restraining gesture, then threw her arms up against the wall, buried her face in them and cried out words that could spring only from such broad foundations as her father had just divined. "Rox!" she sobbed, "My boy! My dear boy! Always a boy! Forever a boy!"

Digby fled from that cry of an all-embracing motherhood which holds all the forlorn ages of man as one. It frightened him, threatened to tear him

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from a hard-won liberation which once again lost would inevitably reduce him to a whimpering mass ineffectual as he was now non-sentient. He went out to wander in the streets. He was not consciously looking for Madeleine, he had no desire to visit old haunts, even Mary was far from his thoughts.

It was as though he had begun a new life which was not a life, as though fate had thrust into his hands a fresh departure, a power of vision divorced from action. He could see all things with a super-human clarity and the mere possession of this faculty, so feebly but so constantly striven for throughout long years of what now seemed puerile analyzing, impelled him to give it all the scope of his limited horizon, apply it to all the every-day evidence which crowds to the eyes of man, yet leaves them blind.

Even while he studied every material obstacle to sight he felt a peculiar impatience against each of them; houses, walls, motor-cars and the enclosing barrier of the encircling girdle of mountains depressed him. When he caught an occasional glimpse of Popo he was conscious of a longing to

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stand on its high summit. "If I might only stand on the highest peak on earth," he murmured aloud, "I could see the whole world and all the intentions of God."

Speaking aloud while alone became a habit with him. Walking at dawn he came upon a long string of shivering bodies, crouched in doorways, littering the sidewalk, tangled with each other in conservation of miserable warmth, clad in filthy remnants of the garments of decency. It was the bread-line. They were waiting for the doors of some charitable institution which had flared into a short life on some woman's conscience-money to open its doors. Standing amid the odorous evidence of distress, he turned and stood watching the frequent flashings of the passing motor-cars of libertine officials and dissolute military, returning from nightly orgies.

"It's a foul soul," murmured Digby, "that fouls its own nest—all of it—that leaves no clean air for its own to breathe!"

In the course of his wanderings on the following evening he found himself before the garden of the hospital. He slipped in, walked along the

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veranda to his wife's window, saw that she was awake, and entered. It was a week since Mary had seen him but his presence aroused in her no special sign of emotion. Her imprisoned eyes studied him with a settled, uncurious apathy. He sat and talked to her but told her nothing of Ellerton, nothing of Madeleine.

Of what use? Mary, the genuine, the consistently simple, had lived for her home alone. It had been her sole exposition of a broad faith and a fixed religion, her one element of moral expression. Her home was gone and had left her twisted body without active soul. She was an abandoned shell, a deserted habitation. These things struck Digby's understanding with a clarity and force which could not be denied. He felt companionship only for that which was dead within her. He left her presence with a feeling of finality, as though he had seen in that particular aspect all that could ever be seen, and returned to his cheerless, dust-covered flat. At the door was a roll of newspapers. Some friend knowing his destitution had been sending him a New York daily.

He opened the bundle, glanced hurriedly over

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the head-lines and then turned to the casualty lists. He was persuaded that Junior was to fall, so convinced that his present occupation amounted to nothing more than a search for satisfaction of curiosity, for a proof of the infallibility of his prescience. He took up from the table an article which was oddly incongruous in that setting of poverty, a long-bladed paper-knife of sterling silver with a glistening handle of cut crystal. It too had been sent to him by some friend of prosperous days but who knew nothing of his present penury, accompanying a copy of *The Education of Henry Adams*. The book he had never read but the knife came in handily for tracing down the columns of fine print. Its point now worked steadily down the page; came to a pause.

"Sergeants," he read, and then in finer type: "Richard Digby, Jr. Mexico, (N. Y.?) K. A."

He took from his breast pocket a much-worn postal card, the only word from Junior which had succeeded in overcoming heartbreaking delays of mails and in penetrating the labyrinth of censorships. It had been written in Hoboken, mailed in Hoboken, on receipt by the authorities of a blanket-

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cable announcing the successful completion of the voyage. "Safely arrived. Love to all. Richard Digby, Jr., A. E. F."

"Father, here is a new word. Tell me the meaning of alarmist."

"Every prophet whose prophecy has not yet come true."

"What then is a Seer?"

"A madman dragging Wisdom by the hair."

CHAPTER XI

DIGBY finally slipped the card into his pocket, arose, dropped the paper, but still holding the knife went out hatless into the streets. He was in the grip of a strange exaltation as though the confirmation of Junior's passing had raised him a long step up on that peak from which he might see the whole world and all the intentions of God. As from an aerie hermitage upon a towering mountainside he looked down upon a vast nation, three million maggots crawling over a mothering host composed of many tribes and a round dozen millions of individuals, massed into a single huge lethargically squirming body.

So vast an entity could be subject to no sudden convulsions of agony; it moved, but with monstrous writhings, each ripple a century of pain. Throughout its length festering patches had a life of their own, supporting the maggot society taking nutriment from corruption. These parasites were only three million strong, but they represented those minute

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forces of evil invisible in their action to the naked eye which infect, contaminate and ultimately conquer with the inexorable finality of gangrene and mortification.

"Why can't they see it?" cried Digby aloud, standing stockstill on an empty street corner. "For four hundred years a Latin incrustation has fed upon this people, sucked its blood, infected it with the virus of an appalling decadence; never governed it, never!"

He started walking again, his head now gone very gray moving from side to side as though to shake itself free from all material actualities. Two acquaintances caught sight of him, stopped simultaneously in their tracks and stared after his terrifying figure, so lank, striding so swiftly, gesticulating so majestically with the gleaming silver paper-knife, disappearing into the gloom of an ill-lighted thoroughfare.

"Even-mind Digby," murmured one of them sadly. "I wondered what had become of him."

Digby hurried on, unconsciously seeking solitudes, turning with impatience when he came across a cluster of lights but pausing whenever he found himself

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at a deserted intersection of streets. At one such corner he cried, "What have I seen? I alone? The age of an eagle, noble, but still a bird of prey; the age of a sucking dove set to hatch the eagle's eggs and destined to feed its voracious young with his own body— And now? Now the age of the seven-year locusts, of the returning black cloud of eternal vultures, doomed through centuries of a monochromatic diet to demand and feed on carrion!"

He hastened from that spot as though fleeing from miasmatic odours only to come to a stand again. "And we—we Americans—have declared a closed season for vultures! Our head has been in the clouds of altruistic reason, our foot heavy upon the neck of a people rotting in bondage. Inarticulate. Only their festering wounds cry out, 'God! God!' where there is no God and no ear to hear!"

An hour later he was still fleeing from the puny, ineffectual artificial lights of men, still seeking the illumination that comes only to the soul made free of darkness. "We have forgotten," he cried out, "that there are sores that only the knife can heal. We have been like blind children, robbed of hearing and scent and the sense of touch, content to make

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mudpies of muck. It's on our hands; it sticks to our fingers. And with those hands we cling to the fouled skirts of liberty and cry, 'Peace! Peace!' when there is no peace! And many whisper gently, 'But now that we have dropped the sword, what can we do?'

"Evacuate!" roared Digby, the shout echoing down the void of the empty street in which he stood. "Not like ghouls who draw aside, watch the murder of their own, then leap across the line to share with the assassin the spoils from the dead. No! not like those who cry softly on the name of a Divinity who came bearing not peace but a sword and hearing no answer whisper, 'The Master is away; let us forget and lie together in frankincense and myrrh!'

"If indeed," he continued, raising his empty hand on high, "we have dropped the sword forever and turned our back upon the scourge with which Our Lord cleansed the temple, then let us use the weapons of peace as *men*, give these cormorants a space of hours to admit a band of honest guardians to the trust they have defiled, a river Alpheus from without to sweep clean once and for all their Augean

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stables of four centuries of filth or else *evacuate*, cut those of us who still live here from the contaminating breath of a life no longer clean and, as the gods above show no favour, cut those at home from the gains of shame! Let no ship of any outraged nation leave or reach these poisoned shores; turn our backs upon the murder of a people if we like but at least keep our hands from puddling in their blood!"

His shoulders shrank in a gesture of abject humiliation. "Oh, Lord!" he cried, "all of us have sinned, all of us who take profit by dishonourable peace or more sordid gain, all of us have sinned. Let every man who shares carrion with the vulture throng be branded with the mark of shame, and every soft woman who feeds from his hand know herself for a harlot!"

With head still hanging low he came out upon a wide space which formed the junction of five of the great avenues of the City of Palaces. He raised his eyes and saw the flag of his country, forgotten by some careless servitor, hanging limp with the night dew high above a faded coat-of-arms. He knew well the emblem held within the circlet of

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bronze; an eagle rampant, holding in opposing talons a sheaf of arrows and an olive branch.

"A miracle has come to pass," he murmured; "there is no war and no arrows; no peace and no olive branch; chaos has laid itself down to sleep!"

He started across the street with a half-formed intention of wakening a servant to proper respect for the flag. A rushing motor-car filled with a ribald band swerved, missed him by inches, hurled itself onward but presently came to a slithering stop. A girl sprang from it and ran back toward Digby's solitary figure continuing its interrupted way to the broad sidewalk.

She wore a frock of foulard silk, dark blue and spotted with great white polka dots, light as the breezes that tossed it about her hurrying limbs. It was simple but ravishing in its revelations of young beauty, open at the neck to the tremulous verge of daring, short in length but still not brazen in disclosure. Her dark hair was piled upon her head which wore no other covering. Her cheeks were pale beneath two spots of borrowed glow.

"Father!" she cried, "where are you going? What are you doing with that knife?"

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Digby trembled suddenly from head to foot; he did not look up but stared at the straight-bladed paper-cutter. "It's sterling silver," he said dumbly. "Perhaps I can sell it. But I—I don't want to sell it. There are sores that only the knife can heal."

Madeleine snatched a chain purse from her wrist. Her eyes were wide and staring, her lips quivering with tiny vibrations she was powerless to master, her bosom rose and fell to a wild fluttering which appeared to threaten to burst her body asunder.

"Daddy," she chattered as one in the throes of a chill, "here's money—plenty of money. Give me the knife."

He took the purse, dropped it, looked into her eyes. They seemed slowly to widen to an absolute, an infinite communion. Within them he saw a struggling prisoner desperately constrained. As one might open the door of a gilded cage to free a panting bird, he struck downward with the knife. It entered at the lovely curve of her young breast, sank into her heart. To her eyes sprang the look of the Madeleine of old, a look of wistful love, of boundless trust and unquestioning adoration.

"Oh, Daddy!" she gasped; smiled, choked and

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fell not headlong but with a slow sinking of the knees to rest.

A hoarse shout came from the motor-car; then a hurricane of explosive sound as it started and roared away up the Paseo, muffler cut-out wide open, a screen of misty smoke trailing it, blotting it from view. It was as though the machine itself were terrified and had bolted from the tragic scene unaided by the nerveless hands of its despicable occupants, vicious children frightened by the price of folly.

Digby suffered no awakening. From half across the square he turned, troubled by the memory of an errand uncompleted. He remembered. He was to have called a servant to take in the flag. He started back but stopped as his eyes fell on Madeleine, no longer Madeleine, only a little heap of flesh untenanted. She knelt with her heavy head bowed very low. About her crumpled body flared the foulard dress. It was like a patch of blue sky, star-spangled, come down from the dome of heaven to hold her from the stain of earth.

"The banner of her people," murmured Digby, and with the words came to himself. He stood

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erect, immobile, his eyes fixed with a piercing intensity on the sacrifice of an Abraham unstayed by the voice of God. A steely composure settled upon his face suddenly ennobled above the limits set to man's mortality and as though in turning his back on Madeleine he turned it also on the last shred of the husk of his own flesh, he strode away with firm step toward the mountains.

"Rox was right," he said aloud but quite calmly. "He couldn't say what he knew in words, he could only live out the knowledge that was in him to the bitter end. But I can say it now; I can say it for him. A man can't abandon the gods within him, he can't moralize and then shirk, cry peace and feed on others' war, and yet live. Upon this foundation is set our slender hope of immortality. No surrender! None! Not to the love of self or of woman or of the dearly beloved, the tender fruit of our own loins. Honour, justice, right, know no division, no partial allegiance fed piecemeal to a complacent God. I will cleave to this divinity alone, to the little spark that is in me. Let it seem cold to alien touch, pitifully dim to others' eyes, yet will I feed it, keep it aglow with the last shred of mortal life!"

As though led inexorably by the thoughts he was

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uttering he started deliberately for Mountain Acre, thirty miles away. What mattered food, raiment or shelter, or the safety of the coward spirit? Only in that beloved spot where he had striven for these passing attributes and reached though blindly beyond them for the greater gifts of God's eternal keeping could he now stand his last watch, his hands red with sacrificial blood, his heart dead but his soul still upright and pinioned for cerulean flight.

In the misty dawn he reached Huipulco, swerved to the left through Tepepan to Noria, turned to the right and faced the first steep rise to San Mateo. Twice he had been hailed by government outposts, and here again. He paid not the slightest attention to the orders of the sleepy guards to halt. Hatless, threadbare, muttering or gesticulating, he passed them by as though they were non-existent. His poverty-stricken figure seemed to none of them worth the waste of a cartridge. They watched him, faintly curious, shrugged their shoulders and let him go.

Until he reached the flat between Topelejo and Parres, Digby's voice was silent, all his breath snatched from his lungs by the strain of the steep climb in the high altitude, but once on the great

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plateau, accidented only by gullies, he began to talk aloud.

"Outposts," he said; "a dozen outposts within the city limits! After years of government control! Not weeks nor months—years! American merchant excursionists holding out the greedy hand of friendship one day and three weeks later a picnic party held for ransom within sight of town and a ranch cleaned of a hundred head of stock in the suburbs. Never a day in three years when bandits haven't overshadowed the Capital. Why? Because authority needs them, because it lives only by disorder and knows it!"

He nodded his head heavily and continued. "This encrustation, this Latin scourge, this horde of parasites cursed by God with the power to read and write, hides itself from a credulous world behind a screen of the printed shibboleths of purest altruism. It makes a law to return the land to the peons, and what happens? The world applauds and the proprietors pay millions to the corrupt officialdom!"

He nodded again. "Unable to take a ride ten miles out of its own capital, it issues an edict that no male shall marry without passing an eugenic test.

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'Wonderful,' cries the world, thinks itself a laggard and never sees the naive announcement in the daily press that the plan has been abandoned because scarcely an applicant could pass! Will the edict therefore die? No, it will surely come again backed by officialdom with no private reputation at stake, and live not on the blood from a man's veins but from his purse."

His head swung despondently from side to side. "A corrupt generation," he murmured. "They slapped the face of the Red Cross in a time of pestilence, cried with inflated pride to the world that they can care for their own, but after two years let their papers describe the horrible death of starving aged women and weakened children eaten alive by rats! In the City—the City of Palaces!"

Finding himself in the long single street of a village he had always known as squalid but teeming with life, smiling and contented in its grime, he stopped and stared. Every house was abandoned, roofs gone, charred walls broken, blind windows already choked with matted bush-growth from within. The once-fine highway was in ruins, far on the road to one of its century-spaced obliterations.

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Until this moment he had not noted the grim significance of its abandonment.

"Just beyond the suburbs," he muttered. "Devastation, slaughter, rapine. While we fought for freedom abroad, these people refused the hand of friendship, devoured their own young, shouted neutrality,' and stood at our backs with a knife they dared not use. And we proclaimed sonorously that every country has a right to its own salvation!"

He hastened on. "Who does not know," he asked, "that the mind of a man whose frame is eaten by the king's evil flares up to a white light of intelligence before it forever dies? And so with this rotten body politic laying its contamination upon a supine sea of human souls. It cries reform, prints reform, sees reform with a crystal vision and wallows far below in the slough of every vice, every dishonour, splashes about in the bogholes of dastardly failure in the performance of daily duty unadorned. No standards left for human frailty, none. They and their women go to the one road, and we are all splashed, all soiled with the infamous mud, even—even Madeleine!"

Staring wide-eyed along the abandoned highway

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he cried out, "Revenue! Graft! Graft! Revenue! They suck and suck, and with foully-caked lips shout to the world, 'See how much blood is still left in the carcass!' and the world answers, 'Wonderful! but it's because the body still struggles. Let me hold it down for you!'

"Who would believe," continued Digby in a loud voice; "who bothers to remember that the conquering parasites who cry 'Patria' like a cuckoo croaking in a stolen nest and who have dragged down into a universal mire of infamy this unhappy land, came to overturn laws by which thieving, the falsifying of weights, the changing of boundary lines, intemperance, adultery and murder, all casual offenses to-day, were punishable by death! And that men lived then who knew a just judge by sight! In our blindness will we see purity in some friendly faction of this seething mass of the uniformly iniquitous? Perhaps, and by backing it help to start another cycle of tyranny on the worn road of Calvary, tail in on the crucifixion of thirteen million miserable souls!"

He stopped, his head hanging to ponderous thoughts. "And while we stand aside and simper,

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'Am I my brother's keeper?' there is no end, no light in sight. Only this. That an ancient power is abroad over the earth to-day which no man has named, a force of destiny for evil or for good vast beyond our present visioning. It is busy piling up the mountain of human woe until such time as men shall drop the scales of hypocrisy from their eyes and gaze upon the truth *behind* the mirror. It is not God nor is it Devil but in its clutch the greatest of men squirm like worms; decked in the puny pomp of mundane authority, holding world-power like a rattle in a baby's hand they bawl for war and it gives them peace; cry 'Peace! Peace!' and it chokes war down their puling throats. Before its measured stride centuries go down, nations pass away. This one, too. Some day—some blessed day of gleaming hope. So long to wait! So long to wait because behind the doctrine of self-salvation we have blared to the world, my neighbour may befoul his own door-step and I may only hold my nose and pass him by!"

He threw up a hand in an expressive gesture. "Why am I the only one to see its measured stride, this force that never speaks to men, only crushes

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them, keeps on crushing them, because they are blind, because they are deaf, because death is a just portion to every people who rot in complacency and forget that inactivity is at the inception of every putrefaction. But I can hear it, I alone can hear. It comes on with a rumbling like a great mill, a crusher of mighty stones as if they were rubble. It says, 'Clean the world or pass away; clean the world or pass away.' We too, all our puerile greatness, lie in its path. We are of the world and we whisper languidly to the world's little toe, eaten by cancer, 'Clean thyself, brother; thy sore is none of my affair! Peace! Peace!' we cheep and cast in our lot with far-away death."

In mid-afternoon he stumbled into Huichilac. He was unconscious of fatigue, oblivious to the staggering of his long stride. Here was ruin, utter ruin. From every side choked windows stared at him, doorless enclosures which had once been houses cried aloud to the open air with an eloquence beyond speech. He turned the corner of revelation, that corner whose turning twenty years before had first disclosed to his eyes the inextinguishable glory of the golden valley. He stood erect, stockstill,

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his shoulders squared, his gray uncovered head disheveled by the wind, his chin uplifted, his eyes fixed in a piercing gaze that soared across illimitable space. The memory of the message that he had torn after long pondering from the heart of this matchless scene echoed in his ears. "The earth is of the body of God."

He stood alone on the vast verge, no longer a pathetic figure. About him was the solitude of the dead, the silently sobbing loneliness that haunts only the path of destruction,—ruined habitations, the neighbourhood of monuments, the grass-grown cobblestones where men once walked and children played.

"Thunder the truth!" shouted Digby, raising both his clenched fists on high.

"Thunder the truth!" echoed empty vale and hill and distant peak. Two sentinels on picket duty crawled out of a thatched shelter on a far-away knoll and stared wonderingly about them.

Digby's voice spoke again, resonant above the answering rumble of the hills. "Thunder the truth!" he roared. "Vultures who feed upon the beautiful body of God! Unclean! Unclean! Naked-necked,

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gory-headed with the blood of their own. The cloud of them is black like the shadow of the wrath of heaven, their talons drip pollution and the poison that kills beyond death, slaughters new-born the hope of resurrection. Loose my tongue, O Lord, to a new commandment: Thou shalt not defile the fair body of God!"

His hands dropped to his sides as though his arms had been suddenly withered, his head fell forward between his shrunken shoulders and his eyes, wide open and frightened, stared from side to side. In that last cry the disembodied mind had flown too high above the realm of common sense ever quite to return. It left his miserable frame to struggle unaided with a bursting heart turned sentient as if to taste the full bitterness of a last despair.

He slunk stealthily, then ran openly, stumbling, falling, rising, down the steep descent to the gateway of Mountain Acre, scrambled through its ruin, hastened up the driveway until he came to where an arch had once opened upon a peaceful garden. A stark and lonely pillar of scorched brick marked the entrance; beyond it was a chaos of matted growth pierced by the pointing fingers of shattered

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walls. What was left of a privet hedge had risen high against the sky and bore black fruit, shriveled and rotting. Arms upthrown, he fell on his knees and buried his face against the brick pillar. In that moment he was all flesh, all suffering.

"Oh, Madeleine!" he sobbed. "My baby! My own baby! Not all the king's horses!"

Far above him the two pickets on outpost duty wagered a handful of beans against a cigarette as to which would hit him first. The cigarette won and at the shock Digby turned suddenly calm. "Peoples," he murmured, "sin collectively; they seldom repay the individual, for life is short, the vengeance of the Lord is long."

THE END





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